BEYOND KHYBER PASS

By the same Author—

WITH LAWRENCE IN ARABIA
ROLLING STONE
COUNT LUCKNER, THE SEA DEVIL
RAIDERS OF THE DEEP
THE FIRST WORLD FLIGHT
WOODFILL OF THE REGULARS
THE WRECK OF THE *Dumaru*
EUROPEAN SKYWAYS
LAUTERBACH OF THE CHINA SEA
INDIA, LAND OF THE BLACK PAGODA
THE SEA DEVIL'S FO'C'SLE
THE HERO OF VINCENNES
KABLUK OF THE ESKIMO

ADVENTURES IN AFGHANISTAN FOR BOYS
THE BOY'S LIFE OF COLONEL LAWRENCE

BEYOND KHYBER PASS

By

LOWELL THOMAS

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BEYOND KYBER PASS

CHAPTER I

THROUGH WAZIRISTAN ON THE WAY TO HIGH ASIA

THREE "forbidden" lands, for us of the West, lie in Asia. The first is "Holy Arabia", the region of the sacred Mohammedan cities of Mecca and Medina; the second is Tibet, far up on the "roof of the world", the meeting-place of the winds of earth, where his Serene Highness, the Dalai Lama, "the reincarnation of the Buddha", rules over the warrior monks who dwell in vast monasteries on the rocky summits of the Himalaya; the third is the land of another mighty range, the Hindu Kush, south of the Oxus River and beyond the North-West Frontier of India—Afghanistan. The door is the Khyber Pass, a door that has refused to swing back to all save a very few of the seekers of adventure who have attempted to pass that way. From the days of Marco Polo to the present time, fewer

of the travellers who have brought back tales from these far places have told us of the life of the people who dwell in the mountains of Afghanistan than have unveiled the mysteries of either "Holy Arabia" or Tibet.

The swaggering Afghan has good reason to swagger. The independence of his wild mountainous country, placed squarely between two jealous rivals, the Bear to the north and the Lion to the south, has remained intact. All the more remarkable this, when one considers that Afghanistan is the gateway to India, with its incalculable wealth. Throughout history, Afghan trails have echoed to the march of northern hosts that looked with lustful eyes on India's riches. Scythian, Persian, Greek, Seljuk, Tartar, Mongol, Durani —these and others have plundered India through the Afghan door. Few invaders of the ages gone by have been checked *en route* by the Afghans. The latter have usually joined with enthusiasm each super-raid and temporarily united forces with the powerful armies that swept resistlessly through to the lush lands of the south. Yet the freedom-loving mountaineers—hiding in ravine and cave—later waged incessant guerilla warfare on all who passed their way. And after the wave

of each fresh invasion of India subsided, they continued in possession of their territory. This sovereignty they hold undisputed to-day, except for the Khyber Pass and parts of Waziristan, which are occupied by a strong British army, and the narrow zone of democracies, ruled solely by tribal council, between Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Province of India.

Afghanistan dislikes the foreigner. Centuries of unpleasant experiences with invaders, coupled with the mountaineer's love of independence, have bred this feeling. Those of the wilder tribes of Afghanistan, especially in the Independent Territory and Waziristan, who object to the rule of the Viceroy of India, are prone to give token of their enmity to the foreigner in the shape of whining bullets that oftener than not reach their mark. Therefore official British India, taking cognizance of the Afghans preference for their own country exclusively, has inserted the words "it is absolutely forbidden" in the conspicuous warning against entering Afghan territory which is posted at the end of Khyber Pass.

Through British, Indian, and American diplomatic channels, during two years in the East, I

had vainly sought for my camera-colleague, Harry Chase, and myself permission to enter Afghanistan. It is an isolated country in which there are no railroads and practically no means of communication with the outside world, except by courier, and there has been so much friction in the past between the Afghans and the British that an introduction from them might be considered in the light of an introduction from a man's oldest enemy.

Just when I had given up all hope and was preparing to sail from Bombay, an invitation to visit Afghanistan came in roundabout fashion through the American chargé d'affaires at Teheran, in Persia. So once more our party recrossed India for fifteen hundred miles on our way to the Afghan frontier, a journey that was to take us into a country wholly Eastern in character, lawless in many ways, fascinatingly untouched by civilization.

Afghanistan has no outlet to the sea, because to the south, between it and the Arabian Sea, lies Baluchistan, a country of arid desert, mountains and plateaux, now ruled by the British in India. To the east are Waziristan, a territory partially under British military occupation, the tribal

region known as the Independent Territory, extending from Gomal Pass, in Southern Waziristan, to Kashmir, and the North-West Frontier province of India, which includes part of Waziristan, the Khyber Pass country, the Peshawar district, Kohistan, and Chitral, bordering on Kashmir. To the north of Afghanistan lie Bokhara and other turbulent states of Russian Turkestan, and to the west is Persia—all names that "fair tingle with romance".

I decided to follow a natural geographical route to Kabul, capital of Afghanistan, and visit Baluchistan, Waziristan, and the Independent Territory on the way to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. After travelling north from Bombay through Rajputana, we crossed the Sind desert by train and ascended the mountains by way of the Bolan Pass to Quetta, the most important military centre for the forces holding British Baluchistan and one of the strongest strategical positions in the world.

The people here are of an entirely different type from those encountered on the plains of India—fine, stalwart-looking fellows with bulging turbans wound round cone-shaped caps of gold thread, which make them look like taller giants

than they are. In the Quetta bazaar we pass hundreds of these Baluchis, Afghans and Pathans of the border region. They wear bushy beards, baggy trousers, and heavy red-leather slippers with upturned toes. There is none of the grovelling and salaaming among them that one sees in the plains. They have an independent air that excites admiration. Their expression does not encourage the *sahib* to strut as he is tempted to do in many parts of the East. For some reason, possibly because they live a little nearer the enervating Tropic of Cancer, the Baluchis are not quite so fierce as their Afghan neighbours, and they have finally become reconciled to the British *raj*.

From Quetta we passed through the Pink Mountains of Baluchistan, mountains far pinker than the Dolomites, and then returned over part of our route and continued our journey north to Waziristan. To reach this barren, inhospitable country after leaving the railway, you must cross the Indus River. During the spring of the year, when the floods are on, the bridges are washed away, and the usual method of getting over is by swimming on an inflated goatskin. At the time of the rains, the Indus swells in many places,

until it is from three to ten miles wide, and swimming across becomes an art. You have to hold one end of the skin in your mouth and keep blowing it up all the time. I tried it, but when I was blowing I forgot to swim and was swept downstream, and when I tried to swim I forgot to blow and nearly sank. So strong and swift is the current that you usually land several miles downstream on the opposite shore. Men with goatskins sit on the bank at strategical points, waiting for travellers to come along and hire these individual goatskin ferry-boats. During the dry season the Indus narrows to a width of a few hundred yards. Long pontoon-bridges are thrown across by the British; and over the bridge near the city of Dera Ismail Khan, "the gateway to Waziristan", come strings of camels, bringing supplies from the port of Karachi, on the Arabian Sea, to the Indian army in Waziristan.

When you first reach Waziristan, you ask why Great Britain bothers about holding this desert region. For years the British have been bickering with the frontier tribes. Respite and lulls there have been; there has never been peace. "Back to the Indus", has been a popular

cry among Indian pacifist agitators as well as among certain factions of the British themselves, since the World War; although, among others, who are more aggressive, advance to the cartographic line supposed to indicate the borders of Afghanistan has been the watchword. This latter policy is the one that keeps the Afghans from becoming too enthusiastically pro-British. Both policies are dangerous. The British in India cannot easily relinquish what tribal territory they have seized in this part of Asia; and India cannot well afford to have the frontier army withdrawn and considerable numbers of Indians left to be disembowelled by the raiding Mahsuds, Waziris, and Afridis, as they surely would be if the troops retired behind the Indus. Nor can the British initiate any forward movement that would precipitate another and fourth Afghan war and lead into Central Asiatic adventures that daunted even the redoubtable Great Moguls. The British can afford neither to get on nor to get out.

They are in Waziristan and no doubt destined to remain there for a generation or two more, unless the Indian volcano blows up and hurls the British *raj* into the Indian Ocean. They gave us

the impression of making the best of a bad job. Already a network of roads has been built through hitherto unadministered districts in Waziristan, and an attempt is being made to cajole the predatory tribes into carving homes for themselves out of the region in which they dwell, rather than carving the innards out of their Hindu neighbours.

As for ourselves, now that we are away from it all, we thank God that we are thousands of miles away from Waziristan, with its wolf-like inhabitants, its appalling barrenness, its hellish temperatures, its cities filled with dust and dirt, disease and sudden death. As we view it from afar, it comes back to us as the very navel of bedevilment. Surely the men who guard such plague-spots on Britain's "far-flung battle-line" deserve much gratitude from stay-at-home Englishmen; more, indeed, than they are likely to get.

When you clamber, puffing and panting, up the bank of the Indus and dismount from your inflated aquatic goat, and when you have made your way for a mile or two over the blistering sand, you pass through a high mud wall and straightway plunge into Central Asia. Dera

Ismail Khan is one of the cities of the frontier whence caravans, having unloaded at the caravanserai, swing through the bazaars and across the deserts and mountains to countries that have changed but little since the days of Timur the Tartar (known as Tamerlane), Kublai Khan, and Baber the Great. But Dera Ismail Khan is more than a picturesque Asiatic city. It is a great military base, headquarters for the British and Indian forces in Waziristan, which cause Afghanistan and its war board to think twice before they contemplate imitating the example of Mohammed of Ghor of Nadir Shah, who coveted the riches of Hind.

We stayed in Dera Ismail Khan just long enough to be nearly eaten alive by mosquitoes and other less audible inhabitants of the town and to make our peace with the gaunt-looking, heat-stricken officers of the headquarters staff. Then we started across the bad lands, gradually making our way to Tank, Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar, through the Khyber Pass to Landi Kotal and into Afghanistan proper. The cars in which we travelled looked as hoary with age as the Eocene mountains that were the principal feature of the topography. Shortly after we had left behind

:he rose-gardens of the bungalows at head-quarters in Dera Ismail Khan, our right front :yre blew off and disappeared up a *nullah*. Later we were obliged to instal a "Stepney" on the .eft rear rim and developed in consequence a swinging movement like that of a Delhi dancing-girl in the mazes of the *nautch*.

Our trail was punctuated by disabled Fords and Crossleys. Thirteen different cars relayed us from the Indus to the Khyber, every one of :hem ready to fly into bits when we entered it, a derelict when we left it. Scores of times we were stranded and obliged to roast in the desert heat while a *bhang*-drugged Sikh or mad Moslem driver fiddled ineffectually with the carburettor. In the end it was usually necessary for Harry Chase to tie things together with his camera-straps until we chugged into the nearest military depot.

Those natives of some parts of Asia who have been graduated from driving camels to driving motor-cars are not only frenzied fanatics in matters religious but are also mechanical maniacs when they get their hands on a motor-car. When they are at a motor-transport depot, they sit :ound, chewing betel-nut and drinking bowls of

bhang and chattering like apes at the Benares Monkey Temple, instead of tuning up their mounts. Later, when they have you miles from the nearest relief-station, they pick out a hot valley where the heat radiates from the surrounding rocks with the ferocity of the nethermost pit, cut off the engine, sputter about lack of tools, and try to overhaul the car, while you sweat and pant and curse in a medley of Hindustani, Pushtu —the Afghan language—and "American". Every man cultivates his temper when he gets to this part of Asia, if he possesses the seeds of one. You sit by the broken car and feel your temper rising like the fires of Stromboli.

Yet the country has a certain fascination. There are British officers who have spent all their lives on the frontier and leave it not by choice but only the necessity. Then they retire to Ealing or to Cheltenham to enjoy their well-earned pension of seven hundred pounds a year and tell their sons and nephews, who are to follow in their footsteps, of *ghazis*, the warrior-fanatics of Islam, and of raids and wars in the bleak hills of far-away Waziristan. Who shall say in what the fascination lies ? The grey hills that jag into the turquoise sky ; the little green

leys ; the mournful beauty of the dawns and lights ; the majestic cirque of hills that girds fertile plain of Peshawar ; the sunlit plain of hat as it stretches out from the pass ; the olate gorges and snowy saltpetre of the er by Bahadur Khel—these things weave a ll, in recollection anyway, that will hold the nory when many more beautiful scenes are gotten.

Forty-five miles across the desert is our first 's run. This brings us to the city of Tank, ich is pronounced "Tonk" for the same son apparently that the English call half- ny "hay-pny", and St. John "Sin-jin". But ore we had been there long we dubbed it ank the Terrible". It is a huddle of hovels a parched plain. Although all the cities and ns of the Afghan frontier have a sameness ut them—the same veiled ladies and colly- n-eyed boys, the same roses and rags—Tank, npared with Dera Ismail Khan, during the t of the summer, is like the depths of Inferno ntrasted with purgatory.

Tank is in the Mahsud country. You perhaps e never heard of the Mahsuds, unless you are tish and have lost a relative at their hands.

Rudyard Kipling in all probability was thinking of their territory when he wrote :

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's
plains,
And the women come out to cut up what remains,
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

CHAPTER II

FREEBOOTERS OF THE AFGHAN BORDER

If you were to roam the world from the Arctic goldfields of Kotzebue Sound to the pearl-fisheries of Thursday Island, you could find no men more worthy of the title "desperado" than the Pathans who live among these jagged, saw-tooth mountains of the Afghan frontier. They obey neither God nor man. Their only law is the law of the rifle and the knife. More elusive than the robber bands of Albania, more daring than the Moros of Mindanao, more cunning than the Yaquis of Sonoro, even more savage than the Mongol bandits of Chinese Tibet are these brigand sons of Benjamin, who say they can trace their descent to the tribes carried away from Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar.

The three main sub-divisions of the Pathans, as the Afghan tribes along the North-West Frontier of India are called, are the Mahsuds,

really a division of the Waziris, the Waziris, and the Afridis. So long as anything has been known of them, their all-consuming passion has been for loot. They have demanded and taken their toll from every conqueror who has come to shake the gold-mohur tree of India. In bullion or in kind they have exacted blackmail down through the ages, from the time of the White Huns of Attila and the Tartars of Timur to that of the Viceroy.

Two things has the Almighty done to this people. First, he has writ their character on their brows, and second, he has woven the strands of discord into the web of their nature. Had he not done so, the English would not to-day be masters of India. The Pathans can be loyal to a man, but not to an ideal. In fact, they have no ideals; hence the rule of the Pathan in India lasted only so long as there was an emperor strong enough to secure it by personal ascendancy. Under a good leader, however, small parties are able to organize with striking effect. Multan, the famous raider, frequently used two hundred men, every one of whom had a definite part to play in a hold-up. Multan was the Afridi Robin Hood, who looted

rich Hindus and made handsome presents to the Moslem poor.

It mattered not to him that the cities of the Afghan border are always guarded by armed police, and troops are within easy call. They happen to be gay towns, too, in which the innocent amusements of the citizens are not interfered with. For instance, there is invariably a *serai* for dancing-boys on the outskirts of the bazaar. To such a *serai* one evening came a troop of musicians, singing love lyrics and playing the lyre. Behind them were four men, carrying a sick man on a bed to the neighbouring hospital. These men put their burden down and paused a moment to watch the dance from the doorway of the *serai*. Among the spectators were also members of Multan's tribe. But there was nothing unusual in this fact, for the *serai* was crowded every night. In the shadows who would notice that Multan himself was there? Or that the end of his turban was tied across his mouth, as is the Pathan custom when there is killing afoot? Then into the firelight stepped Multan, and gave a signal. Forty of the spectators ran quickly to the sick man by the doorway, threw off the quilt, picked up forty rifles

from the bed, and dashed straight to the centre of the city, to the quarters of the silversmiths and moneylenders. Other parties secured a line of retreat. The police at the gate that leads into the quiet fastness of the banking bazaar were wholly unprepared for a savage attack and were easily overpowered. In less than an hour Multan and his men had secured property and bullion to the extent of four lakhs of rupees (four hundred thousand rupees, or about twenty-five thousand pounds) and were retreating to the hills. The police and troops pursued. Multan fought a brilliant rearguard action and got safely to his home with the booty.

It was not till many years after that he met his death in a fight in which he killed four men and wounded two. He was not caught alive. They found him dead, his body riddled with bullets.

Multan, a most secretive and taciturn man, was not typical of his people. As host and conversationalist, the Pathan is equalled only by the Frenchman, whom he resembles in many respects, including his love of family and his jealousy as a husband. Naturally the expression of these sentiments is a little crude in the case of the Pathan, but there was a decidedly Gallic spirit

in the striking gesture of the indignant husband who cut off his wife's head because she had been stared at by another man, and then threw it over the wall of his rival's house, saying, "You may have her face since you like it so much; it's of no use to me!"

Running all the way round the native quarter of Tank is a mud wall some fifteen to twenty feet high and several feet thick. Every yard of it is within sight of a sentry. Native police are also stationed at intervals throughout the bazaar on balconies and roofs. But in spite of all this the Mahsuds continue their raids on the town. The day before we left Tank we watched an exciting demonstration of their tactics.

The ponderous gates at the south entrance to the city were closed and barred. Suddenly the muffled heads of some Mahsud raiders appeared over the wall. Pulling themselves up, they crept stealthily along until they reached the small courtyard of the shop of a Hindu merchant. A camel knelt beside some grain bags, tranquilly chewing his cud. Near-by, a scrawny pariah dog, curled, nose to tail, slept fitfully. Behind bolts of cloth, bags of dried peas, and skeins of yarn slept the unsuspecting merchant and his

wife and daughter, stretched out on their *charpais*, or string-beds.

Down dropped a couple of Mahsuds, quite noiselessly, and unsheathed their knives. Others took up positions on the roof, with rifles pointed toward the street. The first two raiders hurled themselves with gleaming knives upon the sleeping merchant. The remainder of the party rushed into the shop and seized whatever they could find, cash-box, grain-bag, account-books, wife, daughters, everything, including the camel, which had struggled indignantly to its feet and was blaspheming from the bottom of its throat. Then, in another moment, the whole gang was out in the street, followed by the party who had been firing from the roof.

And now came the hue and cry. Police and townsfolk swarmed through the bazaar. It was all just as it had happened to them a hundred times and more before with this difference, that the other raids had taken place in the glare of burning houses and to the accompaniment of the screams of the dying, instead of in the sunlight. For Captain Wodehouse, of the Frontier Police, had helped us stage this particular raid, so that Chase, from a neighbouring roof, might

train the lens of his motion-picture camera on the scene of action, for the ultimate benefit of London, Paris, New York and Chicago.

After the show Wodehouse collected his Mahsud ruffians together, distributed our baksheesh, and gave orders for the dispersal of the crowds that had collected. There were no casualties, except in the case of a veiled lady who had fainted from excitement but was revived by her husband with severe pinches.

No casualties, but, alas, the very next afternoon there was a real raid some ten miles off. Captain Wodehouse was called out with a patrol of eleven men, and in the evening, while we were on our way deeper into the heart of the Mahsud country, to the Ahnai Tangi, he was mortally wounded. May he rest in peace. We feel that the scenes he helped us to portray bear witness in a small way to the valuable service that he, prince of good fellows and gallant soldier, gave in the wilds of Waziristan. Thanks to officers like Captain Wodehouse and his famous predecessors on the Afghan frontier, such as John Nicholson and Lord Roberts, and thanks to Tommy Atkins and his Indian comrades in arms, the inhabitants of the rich plains of Hindustan

are able to enjoy a peace and a prosperity rarely experienced by their ancestors.

From Tank we motor on along the military highway that leads to the last British outpost. But let us increase the speed and get to our next camp before dark; men have been killed along almost every yard of this road to Jandola, and a breakdown at this hour would not be at all healthful.

The Mahsud villages we pass remind us somewhat of the medieval strongholds of Europe. They are surrounded by walls. In fact each family has its own high-walled enclosure, with a square tower at one corner; for when these people are not fighting an outside enemy, they are usually involved in bitter blood-feuds among themselves. Often-times a man will sit up in his tower for weeks or months, or even for a year, and have his meals brought there, and sleep there, with his Martini between his knees, peering out through a slit, waiting for an opportunity to shoot his enemy who lives across the street. We remain under canvas at Jandola and hear, during the small hours, the occasional *plonk* of a sniper's bullet and see, from under the tent-flap, the glare of Verey lights.

Next day we go on to Kot Rai. It was here that the biggest action was fought that ever took place in a frontier war. Four thousand five hundred tribesmen all armed with modern rifles, held the heights. Behind them were fourteen thousand more, with Martinis, and ten thousand women and boys, acting as carriers. Great Britain's casualties on that day were eight hundred, but the Mahsud power was broken.

When we were on the Ahnai Tangi, it was hard to imagine that a war was still in progress in this territory. There had been a rain few days before our arrival. The crops showed forth the mercy of Allah, and the rotundity of the fat-tailed sheep testified to his bounty. Women worked in the fields, while their babies sprawled in the sun. But the scene might have changed at any moment with the crack of a Mahsud's rifle.

Imagine a convoy of ammunition proceeding slowly up the river road. The officer in command is wondering whether there are any snow-trout to be caught on this radiant spring morning. Sunlight glitters on the bayonets; the heliograph of the advance-guard is at work. Suddenly a shot rings out; the officer falls; the

camels crowd together, burbling, and their attendants run off; the escort troops take cover and begin to shoot. A hell of sound breaks loose. A machine-gun is in action at the nearest picket, and the Mahsuds are firing volleys. A dozen camels are wounded and bolting hither and thither. Since the telephone connection is cut, a runner is sent back for reinforcements. He takes five steps and falls. Another tries and then a third; both are wounded.

The enemy fire increases in intensity. The Mahsuds have been watching this convoy day after day. Behind them are women and boys, carriers of ammunition and water, and, *inshallah*, the spoils of victory. Near the riflemen crouch men with daggers. Their loins are girt, and the joy of paradise is in their eyes. Suddenly their leaders stand erect. They dash forward to loot and disembowel. But the troops are ready. Only first-class, thoroughly seasoned troops can cope with the attack. In spite of the hail of lead that is falling around them, they drop two of the knifemen. The rest rush on to the bayonets that await them. The onslaught has failed. The Mahsuds lie among pebbles and blood, each gripping a long knife.

What is the good of it? God knows! But to the Mahsuds on the hilltop, their comrades lie no longer on those bloody pebbles; they one and all recline "on couches with linings of brocade, and the fruit of two gardens is within easy reach of them. There are damsels there with retiring glances, whom nor man nor jinnee hath touched before them: like jacinths and pearls are they, the fair, the beauteous with large dark eyeballs, kept close in their pavilions."

And so the war goes on, as it has gone on for fifty years and more. The British soldier—and his Indian comrade—continues to sweat up sultry hillsides and toil along with the daily convoys, living a life more solitary than that of the keeper of a sultan's harem, with none of the distractions enjoyed by that official, a life more ascetic than a priest's, with none of his spiritual consolations, a life more dangerous than a rum-runner's, with no excitement save the fear of sudden death. It is only an idea that keeps the troops at their work—the idea of duty.

From Southern Waziristan, the land of the intractable Mahsuds, we motor north across the mountains and stony desert. More mud-walled villages, with more business-like towers. Even

around Bannu, the Waziri metropolis, where the land is irrigated by the Kurram River and highly cultivated, the Waziri retains his wild hillman's aspect. With his sharp features and hawk's eyes, in early middle life he looks like a hungry wolf, and he is !

Seventy miles north-east of Bannu we ascend into the mountains to Kohat, one of the most notorious cities of the Afghan frontier. Kohat is an important military station and the scene of frequent night raids on the part of the Afridis. Not long after we passed through the town, Afridi outlaws crept stealthily into the bungalow of Major A. J. Ellis, during that officer's absence, murdered his wife, and then carried off his beautiful eighteen-year-old daughter without even arousing the guards who were but a few yards away. Had a punitive expedition attempted to follow the kidnappers into the mountain fastness of the Tirah region, the Afridis probably would have murdered Molly Ellis. The High Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, Sir John Maffey, knew this, so he commissioned a brave medical missionary, a Mrs. Starr, to go alone into a region where no European had ever ventured before, in search of Major Ellis's

daughter. The tribesmen so admired Mrs. Starr's courage that they allowed the girl to return unharmed.

As thieves, these tribesmen are in a class by themselves. On more than one occasion, when I have been sleeping in a tent with a detachment of troops, Afridis have crept into the camp and silently carried out one of their night raids. British soldiers in this area sleep with their rifles chained to their bodies to prevent them from being stolen. So artful are the raiders that they have been known to take the bedclothes from under a soldier without waking him. Even if observed, they usually get away, because they grease their bodies to make them slippery.

The Afridis live in the grim country of the Kohat Pass and in the Tirah region. They are tall, fair-skinned, shaven-pated, and of markedly Jewish type. Allah has blessed them with a glorious climate, fertile valleys, herds of cattle, and many camels. But the blood of fighting men is in their veins. From the thick mud forts where they dwell, they emerge from time to time to carry on bitter feuds with neighbouring tribes or to wage war with the frontier army of British India. The majority of them are now well

armed. It is fortunate for the peace of India that the inter-tribal warfare generally keeps the one hundred thousand Afridis busy among themselves.

There is, naturally, a great demand for lethal weapons among these people, and this demand has created a remarkable source of supply—a rifle factory in the wilderness, where semi-savage mechanics have taught themselves to bore rifle-barrels and make breech-blocks. This rather famous little factory, situated in the Independent Territory between Peshawar and Kohat, in the country of the Adam Khel Afridis, was started some fifteen years ago. In much the same altruistic spirit as that in which Henry Ford worked out a low-priced motor-car, a certain Afridi *malik*, or headman, named Sher Din Shahabuddin, set out to make a rifle with which the poor man could kill his enemy at small expense. The *malik* had to contend with many difficulties—lack of men, money and materials. But he imported workmen from Sialkot and spent all his savings in buying steel from Bombay, and somehow or other he nursed the new industry along, so that at the time of his death he was able to hand over a flourishing factory to

his five sons. Then the five sons quarrelled, as sons are wont to do, and set up factories on their own account. Three of these have been successful, and, considering the machinery and men at their disposal, they turn out surprisingly good weapons.

We were coldly received at the first factory of the village, but farther on we found a rival brother, who was well disposed. He gave us tea and showed us over his plant. Since the war, the pass-made rifle, he told us, has had to face a Bolshevist competitor, which is being smuggled into India in large quantities. This rifle has a modern breech-action instead of the Martini lever-action of the pass-made rifle and is equal in accuracy and durability to the British Lee-Enfield. It sells for four hundred rupees or about £30. A pass-made rifle takes one man ten days to build and costs eighty rupees. Because of its cheapness, this weapon will probably be able to hold its own against all competition, but even its makers do not claim that it is equal to the European article. In fact, our friend, the manufacturer, carried a perfectly good Lee-Enfield himself.

The stocks, the Martini breech-block mechan-

isms, and the barrels are sometimes made by different persons, sometimes by one man; but anything like mass production is unknown. To see these men boring out barrels on a wobbly hand lathe, shaping a breech-block with a chisel and a broken file and holding a stock between their toes while they whittle away at it with a knife, is to see a miracle in the making. For miracle it is that an excellent imitation of a Martini-Henry should be turned out with crazy implements up here in the mountains on the border of Afghanistan.

Unlike pleasures elsewhere, the cost of killing in the Independent Territory has fallen by about 200 per cent. since the war. This is due to the availability of a large number of rifles lost by the British-Indian Government through the defection of various militias and tribal levies on the frontier, to the loot of rifles and ammunition taken from convoys during operations, and to the import from Russia of more rifles than were ever smuggled in the old days through Muscat. In 1913, when arms and ammunition, brought from Germany to Muscat, had to be taken thence in dhows across the Persian Gulf and afterward transported by caravan to the Independent Territory,

the price of a German rifle, landed in the country, was six hundred rupees. At Muscat, before it had been run past English cruisers, it was worth only four hundred rupees but was a gamble at the price. In every Afridi village there are men who can tell how they sold three or four camels to get a couple of these rifles, and how the rupees they gave to the Arab go-between went into his pocket, while the rifles, under the vigilant care of the English, went to the bottom of the Persian Gulf.

The factories in the pass are a proof of what the Pathan can do if he tries. But as a rule the Pathan will not try. He does not want to have more of the blessings of civilization than he can help. Just the rifle factory. So much and no more. The Kohat Pass will never become a hive of industry. The Pathan does not believe in industry. He believes in Allah, who of his bounty will dispense the things required or in his wisdom deny them. Therefore the Pathan is well content and wiser, perhaps, than we, who have gone through the fire unto the Moloch of industry. The Pathan does not envy the West its machines. He does not want them, although he is ready to turn them to use if he can

Progress is a disease of the West. *Inshallah*, it shall never come to a land where men need only for their happiness under Providence a rifle, a wife, and some land to till.

To one village, an example of the primitive democracy of Islam, we had the good fortune to be invited. In spite of the fact that we should have been stopped by the British authorities had our destination been known (for this wild no-man's land is strictly forbidden ground), we decided to accept the headman's invitation. We were the first Westerners there in forty years. Our hosts took no chances; an armed escort met us on the frontier and accompanied us across the charming Khui valley, then knee-deep in wheat and barley. "There will be no necessity to raid Peshawar this year," one of their number remarked, "for the bounty of Allah is great."

We drank tea and ate sweetmeats in several of the Khui houses—simple and scrupulously clean mud habitations, with little furniture save tables and string-beds. Each house was fortified and provided with a loopholed roof, from which attacks could be repelled. Our hosts sat at tea with their rifles beside them. "An eye for an

eye and a tooth for a tooth," is still the law in Khui.

Love, lucre and land are the chief causes of blood-feuds among the wild tribesmen of the Afghan frontier. Disputes arising over the irrigation of land are the commonest; quarrels over money (especially the apportionment of an inheritance among brothers and cousins) come next in order; and the ladies make a bad third. A wife costs only the price of a rifle or two good camels; so, if she misbehaves she can be beaten or divorced or can have her nose cut off. Although the last punishment is not often resorted to, for a reason that has become an English proverb, still the possibility has a deterrent effect upon misconduct.

When Afridi soldiers go on leave from service in the Indian regiments to which they are recruited, they often have to be released in batches, so that they may get safely to their homes. Some time ago, for instance, there was war between two villages of the Adam Khel country. Because of the vigilance of the men from Jinakor, who would lie in wait for Khui leave men, the journey from the Indian frontier to Khui was one of the greatest danger and difficulty. Once

a Khui man was found, alone and unarmed. He was promptly shot. Khui had its revenge, however. Next day the Khuis carried the war across to the Indian side of the border, caught a Jinakorite close to the frontier in a lonely spot, bound him, dragged him back into the Independent Territory, and proceeded to cut his throat at leisure and with the full approval of the tribal law. "*Allahu akbar;* God is greater," said the men from Khui, before opening their enemy's jugular vein.

Of late, however, there has been a strong movement for peace and arbitration in the villages of the Independent Territory, in which the tribesmen obey neither the Viceroy of India nor the Amir of Afghanistan. It is realized that blood-feuds waste the productive strength of a tribe, and the village elders do their best to settle quarrels amicably. Their methods are even sterner than the Mosaic law of revenge; for instance, an offending family often has its homestead burnt, several of its members killed, and the survivors condemned to pay a fine that may amount to a thousand rupees. Punishments so terrific, which are by no means uncommon, serve to instil a wholesome respect for the

council of village elders. The councils of enemy villages not infrequently have peace conferences, which are about as successful as those of the West. Sometimes they achieve definite results. Military holidays are arranged between Khui and Jinakor, and the Adam Khels can go to and fro between Peshawar and their homes without bringing out a party of skirmishers.

Nobody really enjoys a blood-feud; it is a legacy of hatred that exterminates some families and makes even the strongest suffer. Yet undying shame would come upon the family that did not take its turn in the feud. "Gul Must has killed my brother (young rascal, he was well out of the way, presuming as he did to steal two of my best Kabuli camels) because my uncle killed Gul Must's father this time last year (thereby giving the inheritance of five score fat-tailed sheep to Gul Must), and now I must kill someone of Gul Must's clan. I am inclined to think it will be his little nephew; I shall stalk him as he tends his sheep. . . ." So it goes on. If a member of either side kills out of turn or kills a woman as she works in the fields, then he may expect the vengeance of the tribe, which will

probably take the form of burning his house. A new quarrel followed by a murder is nowadays often settled by the council in terms of cash payment. A man's life is valued at about one thousand rupees, a woman's honour at about five hundred, and her life at from four to eight hundred rupees according to her age. But it would be quite wrong to suppose that the Afghan is commercial-minded where his honour is concerned. On many occasions he feels that nothing but blood can wash out an insult.

The Afridis, and in fact all Afghan-Pathan peoples abhor stupidity, indecision, and hair-splitting (except in theological controversy) and will follow only a leader with courage and dash. Warm-hearted to those they love, they are brutally cruel to their enemies. Impulsive to a fault, they will wait patiently for years in order to get revenge. They are hospitable, yet canny, and excessively conceited, but feel a humble resignation to the will of Allah. They have also the germ of that spirit of travel and adventure that has made every great nation and is the hope of the world. An intelligence officer, while cross-examining some villagers, was astounded to hear one of the ruffians say: "Don't listen to

that guy. Damn fool, rubber-neck everywhere, get wise on nothing. . . ." This man had been west round the world, but had found no place like home.

The finest of the Pathans, from a moral and a physical point of view (intellectually they have unknown possibilities), are the mountaineers who inhabit the unadministered zone between Afghanistan and India. Although these men raid down into India whenever the spirit moves them, no outsider can cross into their tribal territory, where the only law is that of the knife and the rifle. Here they live their own lives, sans schools, sans police, sans law-courts, sans taxes, free from the chains of civilization, and enjoying to the full the blessings of barbarism.

But not all Pathans are brigands. Some of them stoke the tramps of the Eastern trade; others take *tongas* to Kashmir, or camels to Australia, or smuggle *kut*, a fragrant root used as medicine, from Tibet and Kashmir to India. But wherever they rove, and whether they end with a fortune or with a felon's gyves, their hearts are always in their hills, and thither they return.

CHAPTER III

A CITY OF A THOUSAND AND ONE SINS

In fourteen years of following foreign trails together, Harry Chase, my camera-colleague, and I have halted our caravan in many a far-off city, the mere recollection of whose name makes us long to bundle up our bedding-rolls again.

There's Cairo, Fez, and Ispahan,
Bangkok and Singapore;
There's Trebizond and Teheran
There's Rio and Lahore.
Around the name of each there clings
Enchantment's golden veil;
The magic of strange lands and things,
The glamour of the trail.

None fascinated us more than Peshawar, Paris of the Pathans, city of a thousand and one sins, and the gateway to Central Asia. It was here that we prepared for our journey to Kabul, capital of "forbidden Afghanistan". Like Constantinople, New York, or Singapore, Peshawar

is a caravanserai. Men camp in its houses instead of living in them, and they who swarm in the city to-day would cheerfully loot it to-morrow if they got the chance.

Long years ago, when I set forth from Chicago on my first expedition, a veteran traveller remarked to me that human beings are far more interested in other human beings than they are in architectural wonders, such as the Pyramids or the Taj, or in the wonders of Nature, such as the glaciers of Greenland or the volcanoes of Japan. If that is true, and I believe it is, then bring your hubble-bubble and come with me out to the balcony where my friend, Abdul Ghani of Peshawar, sits puffing on his narghile, or water-pipe, above the Street of the Story-tellers, and you will see a human pageant unlike any other in all this wide world.

To-morrow, if Allah wills, and if the Amir does not change his mind, and if his playful subjects do not shoot holes in the tyres of our American motor-car, and if a thousand and one other things do not happen that invariably do happen to delay travellers east of Suez, why then we will pass out of the old Bajauri Gate and journey through the Khyber Pass to mysterious

Afghanistan, where but few other Americans have passed before us.

But to-morrow may never come; so to-day let us follow the example set by the countless millions who have stopped in this Central Asian caravanserai during the past five thousand years—yes, even to the extent of visiting the *serai* of the dancing-boys and the street of the daughters of Jezebel and to tasting the delights of *charas*. We are not here to sit in judgment on the Paris of the pleasure-loving Pathans. We are merely onlookers, bound for a remote land beyond the Khyber and the Safed Koh. After all, standards of morality not only differ in different ages, but in different climes. What happens in Paducah or Poughkeepsie would startle Peshawar, and *vice versa*. Let us be frank, however, and say that of the thousand and one sins of Peshawar most are unmentionable and some are unbelievable. They are the sins of opium and hemp and dancing-boys and jealousy and intrigue and that deviltry which gets into men's blood in certain latitudes. They are the sins of battle, murder, and sudden death, of gambling and strange intoxications, of savagery, sentiment, and the lust of revenge that becomes the strongest of all passions.

For two years, while travelling in India, Burma, and Malaya, Chase and I had tried in vain to obtain permission to enter Afghanistan. We were eager to visit, more than any other part of Asia, this little-known country that has become the most powerful state in the Mohammedan world since the break-up of the old Ottoman Empire. But our chances of getting to Kabul seemed to be considerably less than those of a camel's passing through the eye of a needle. At last we gave up and were about to shake the dust of the East from our shoes and board a steamer at Bombay for London. Then, through the intervention of the American chargé d'affaires at the court of the Shah of Persia, the Honourable Cornelius Van H. Engert, the Amir unexpectedly consented to our visiting his country.

Here at Peshawar we are already as far inland from Bombay and Calcutta as Khartoum is from Cairo or as Minneapolis is from New Orleans. A tongue of red, the map-maker's sign for Great Britain, extends far northward. Between Peshawar, at its tip, marking the terminus of the British-India railway, and the end of the Russian military railway in Turkestan, lies the wild

mountain country of the warlike Afghans, who use camels as their only practical means of transport.

A British military railway extends from Peshawar through the Khyber Pass to the frontier. The caravans that trek back and forth along the golden road to distant Samarkand are allowed to pass through the narrow gorges west of Peshawar only on Tuesdays and Fridays. On these days a military escort accompanies merchants and camel-drivers for the thirty-six miles between Peshawar and the Afghan border, to protect them from the brigands.

It is August, the hottest month of the year. Beyond lies the desert. If we had our choice, this is the one season when we would not cross the desert. But the Amir has invited us to come to Kabul at once. To visit Afghanistan—an opportunity that comes to few people—is worth enduring a few hardships. Patiently we wait for the British *raj* to open the Khyber Pass.

Although Peshawar is the capital of the North-West Frontier Province of India and under British rule, the name of the Amir of Afghanistan is mentioned far more frequently in the bazaars than is the name of

His Excellency the Viceroy of India. Peshawar is a veritable paradise for plotters. As we sit on the balcony overlooking the Street of the Story-tellers, our host, Abdul Ghani, between puffs on his narghile, tells us in low tones that in a not far-distant day the Afghans hope to rule again in Peshawar, just as they did before the advent of the British *raj*. Then he points to the tall Afridi, Swati, and Mohmand giants swaggering by and nods knowingly, as much as to say that he rather believes they will.

The street beneath Abdul Ghani's balcony is wide and lined with the shops of dealers in Turkestan carpets, astrakhan from Khorasan, and Bokhara silks. Near-by is the bazaar of the coppersmiths. Here, side by side, are the stalls of the master-craftsmen, who tap, tap, tap incessantly, as they hammer pots and pans from shiny sheets of metal. Copper-work is a hereditary trade for which Peshawar is famous, and the din reminds us of the proverbial boiler-shop. The crowd is as dense as it was along the Avenue de l'Opéra in Paris on Armistice day. Green-turbaned *mullahs*, with smart beards and moustaches clipped over the centre of their lips, pull back their robes from the touch of waxy-

faced Hindus whose throats they would be only too delighted to slit in the name of Allah. Lousy Provindahs, the Afghan tribesmen from the hills around Ghazni who handle most of the caravan trade between India and Samarkand, saunter by, all swagger and rags and stink. We shall have several thousand of them as our companions to-morrow, when we start for Kabul. But we shall keep to the windward of them.

Abdul Ghani forgets to puff for a moment and points out three nondescript ruffians who, he tells us, are escaped criminals. On their heads is a large reward. But Abdul is not interested in the reward. Nor are any of the others in the crowd who recognize this trio. Despite the protection that the British *raj* gives them in Peshawar, Abdul Ghani and his fellow-townsmen know that if they failed to mind their own business they would wake up some morning to find themselves sitting beside the fountains of paradise. The mere thought of it makes Abdul shiver, for he, jolly soul, is a good Mussulman who thinks this world not a bad sort of place. Unlike those wandering Hindu saints, naked as rats, over there begging rice from Babu Mukerji, he does not believe in torturing his body to save

his soul. Abdul prefers one Kashmiri hand-maiden in this world to a dozen houris in the next.

The crowds swirl slowly beneath us, vanishing into narrow alleys and passage-ways on either side of the street, where lean dogs nose and snarl among the offal. From the uttermost confines of China to the walls of Jerusalem men come to Peshawar, bringing the commerce of a continent. Semites with corkscrew curls from Herat and Merv and merchants from Kashgar who have come down across the lonely Pamirs and the Malakand mingle with the men of the Zakka Khel. Here comes a group of gay lads from the uplands of Tirah, new to the city, bent on the delights of civilization and *charas*. In front of them saunter the more sophisticated youths of the plains, hand in hand, with roses behind their ears and their collyrium-painted eyes coquettishly glancing about and returning stare for stare. Beggars, thieves, dwarfs, human monstrosities with seal-like flippers where their arms ought to be, clowns, fakirs, rose-sellers, and purveyors of *charas* move on equal terms with handsome Roman-nosed Afridis, bobbed-haired bandits from Black Mountain, shaggy men from Yarkand, and scarlet-turbaned Rajput sepoys.

On the adjoining balcony is a chorus of coughers, whom we hear even above the din of the coppersmiths. We ask Abdul Ghani if his neighbour maintains an asylum for Peshawaris in the last stages of galloping consumption. He laughs and replies that the coughers are smoking *charas*. Calling a servant, he sends for a vendor of this vile pulp, a resin made from the crushed leaves of the hemp-plant. It has a clean, pleasant smell when pure, as found, I dare say, in the wallet of that Adam Khel Afridi patriarch over there, who is haggling loudly with Mathuswamy, the Madrasi, about the price of a handsome silk turban. He, no doubt, as a connoisseur, has his *charas* smuggled through the passes of the Safed Koh from Kabul. In the bazaars the government excise commissioners sell a lower grade at a higher price. Taking a lump about the size of a sixpence, Abdul mixes it with his tobacco and puts it in the receptacle of his water-pipe. Then on top of the mixture of tobacco and *charas* he daintily places a red-hot piece of camel-dung from a smoking brazier. But he explains that this part of the operation should really be attended to by a slim Kashmiri hand-maiden. Abdul had one, but last week she ran

off with a swashbuckling braggart from Orakzai.

To show us how it is done, Abdul takes the first pull on the long, flexible tube of the narghile. Slowly and rapturously he inhales the carbon dioxide, essence of camel, nicotine, hemp, hubble-bubbling through the water of the pipe. He draws the smoke deep down into his lungs. Then, as he coughs it up again, he passes the tube over to me. But one puff is quite enough to satisfy our Western curiosity, and between coughs Chase and I assure our host that henceforth we prefer to pursue our study of the drug at second-hand. Abdul tells us that the habitual *charas* smoker experiences a delicious dreaminess combined with an inordinate appetite for food. You feel that you are sitting by the fountains of the gardens of the faithful, drinking paradisiacal wine, which never makes you sick (as *bhang* so often does), while houris of whom you never tire (as you do of your wife, good soul, may her shadow increase!) dance before you with pearl-and-ruby-braceleted feet. Personally, we fail to experience any of these delightful sensations. But a giddiness comes over us, and we feel as though we are riding on a magic carpet through air that an aviator would call decidedly bumpy.

Many fantastic tales are told in Eastern bazaars of the subtle effects and queer mental sensations that result from smoking *charas*. There could have been no more appropriate setting for one of the tales that Abdul Ghani related than the balcony overlooking the Street of the Story-tellers.

"It was the year that Habibullah Khan was foully murdered in his sleep at Jalalabad," Abdul began, as he dropped another *charas* pill in the glazed bowl of his pipe and covered it with another glowing coal. "The tribesmen along the caravan route were more truculent than usual, and three travellers pushing on ahead of the camels of the *kafila*, or caravan, with which they had crossed Afghanistan from Mazar-i-Sherif, were trying to make the two final stages between Landi Kotal *serai* and Peshawar in one day. But night was already upon them when they left the eastern end of the Khyber, and upon their arrival at the Bajauri Gate they found it closed and locked. One of the three was a whisky-toper, the second was an opium-smoker and the third a *charasi*. They were very anxious to get into the city and sat down outside the gate to drink and smoke and talk the matter

over. Said the whisky-drinker, 'Let's break down the gate!' The opium-fiend toasted his pill, yawned, and said, 'No, let's go to sleep now and wait till morning.' Then spoke the *charas* smoker, inspired by a few drafts from his narghile: 'I have it. Let's crawl through the keyhole.' "

The *charas* cougher, like the "snow-sniffer", addicted to cocaine, in the West, has only a limited life, and only in the first half is it a merry one. Under the other sounds of the bazaars of Central Asia, the coughing of the *charasi* beats an irregular rhythm. He coughs and coughs and coughs, so that he has no time to do anything else. He does not talk; certainly he does not think. In the end he is taken to an asylum, where he finds a row of *charasis* and joins the chorus of coughers. And instead of the paradise of which he dreamed, hell is now before him. In the words of his holy book: "Of tainted water shall he be made to drink. He shall sup it and scarce swallow it for loathing, and death shall assail him on every side, but he shall not die, and before him shall be a grievous torment."

There go a red-eyed Provindah and a Mongol Uzbeg from Khokand. They both look as

though they have had too many bowls of *bhang*. We ask Abdul Ghani to tell us something about this mysterious beverage, and he explains that *bhang* is *charas* mixed with water, milk, and sugar. A large-sized tea-cup is a fair dose. It produces a most unpleasant red-eyed form of intoxication, with none of the brightening effects of *charas* or the conviviality of wine. It is a stimulus to crime; under its influence a man remembers his old grudges and develops new ones. It is the murderer's drink. If that Provindah and Uzbeg fail to pick a fight before they reach the Kabuli Gate, it will be a miracle.

Some years ago there was a missionary living in Peshawar who had a Mohammedan cook, so the story runs. One day under the influence of *bhang*, the cook murdered the Rev. Isador Lowenthal. In the graveyard outside the city a tombstone marks the spot where he was buried. Sandstorms and winter winds have obliterated one of the lines of the epitaph, with the following somewhat startling result:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF
THE REVEREND ISADOR LOWENTHAL
MURDERED BY HIS COOK

"WELL DONE THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT."

Only the richer men smoke opium; for the paraphernalia of pipe and lamp and needle is far too complex for the border tribesmen and calls for the service of a handmaiden from Kashmir. But the drug is eaten to a large extent. If you were to ask the truth of that tall Sikh, just pointed out by Abdul Ghani—a typical descendant of Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab—no doubt he would deny it, but he and most of his silky-bearded co-religionists from Amritsar and Lahore firmly believe in the tonic properties of opium and eat a little every day for the stomach's sake. The British Government took account of this habit during the war and supplied, in reasonable measure, the opium demanded by the Sikhs at the front. Large cases of the drug (labelled "treacle" for the benefit of reformers from Exeter Hall) followed Sikh regiments into the field. But the British craftily mixed propaganda with the tiny parcels of treacle and were fairly successful in curing the troops, in their new surroundings, of the opium habit.

During the languid hours of the sun's decline, Abdul Ghani told us of still another deadly drug used in Peshawar, called *post*. Tradition holds that the Mogul Emperor Jahangir preferred it

to sherbet and even drank it in the early morning, while attendants curled his hair and massaged his imperial person. This mixture contains laudanum, arrack, sugar, and cardamoms, and the fate of the drinker is even more swift and lamentable than is that of the *charasi*. It is never long before the *post* tippler is gathered to his fathers.

CHAPTER IV

PESHAWAR, THE PARIS OF THE PATHANS

BUT Peshawar is not given over exclusively to the drug habit and the *charas* complex. To leave this impression would be unfair not only to its virtues but to its other vices. As for its virtues, the mat-screens stretched on the roofs of the mud houses bear testimony to the decorum of the harem and its deadly dullness. The happy, cherished children proclaim the innocence and harmlessness that exist behind the clay-coloured and whitewashed walls around us. If the Merciful has blessed a Pathan with a son, you will see him carried shoulder-high by his proud parent. Behold a Black Mountain tribesman from Swat and his tiny son in velvet vest and tinselled cap. See with what dignity and poise the youngster struts. The mountaineer would lay down his life for the lad, but had Allah merely presented him with a girl, well, he would have regarded her simply as better than no child at

all. He might dispose of her, at eighteen, for a thousand rupees and a fat-tailed sheep or two.

Now and then veiled figures drift by us like wraiths, unregarded and unseeing. In neither virtue nor vice do the women of Peshawar play a leading role. The *serai* where the dancing-boys live exceeds in importance even that long street where the daughters of Jezebel look out on scenes scarcely changed, I fancy, in the two thousand years and more since Elisha walked the streets of Acre. Now, as then, their hair is tied with rough gems, their eyes are darkened with antimony, their fingers and toes are stained with henna. Now, as then, they look down from their window balconies, and men, seeing their beauty, are lost. But their wage is not in sordid cash; they will accept only a jewel or cloth of gold or silk. Only those sunk irredeemably, even in Peshawar, with its evil reputation, will accept gifts of money.

Our party, in the journey across Waziristan and up to our arrival in Peshawar, has consisted of four persons. There is Chase, of course. We have travelled together for many years now, and before we met he had already visited half the countries of the world as the photographic

assistant to another globe-trotter. Chase is unique. He can grind his own lenses just like the German experts at Jena. He can take his cameras to pieces and remove the fine particles of dust that have got into them during a desert simoon, and then, in putting them together, usually he can discover some way of improving their intricate mechanism. His ability to make the fullest possible use of both his still and motion-picture cameras has made him one of the most famous cameramen in the world. But his genius does not end here. Chase can do the same things to your watch after it has survived a sand-storm that he can do to his cameras, and he can effect the same magic spell over a derelict motor-car. In fact, Chase is the sort of man who is invaluable on an expedition, as I discovered years ago, when we were with the Allied armies in Belgium, France, Italy, Serbia, Palestine, and Arabia, and afterwards during our travels in Australia, New Zealand, the Far East, and India.

Then there is Major Francis Yeats-Brown, D.F.C., R.A.F., of the Seventeenth Indian Cavalry. The major has spent some eighteen years in India. Not only is he an expert polo-player, but he speaks various languages of the

East, including Pashto, spoken by the Afghans, and he loves India and understands it as few Europeans do. The major has survived many thrilling adventures. During the war he served as an aviator in Mesopotamia and demolished telegraph-lines in enemy territory. He was caught by the Turks and marched across the North Arabian Desert to Afium Kara Hissar. After many attempt to escape he finally eluded his captors and until the Armistice lived in Constantinople, disguised as a German governess. But the Amir of Afghanistan, refuses to let us take Major Yeats-Brown to Kabul. So our Bengal lancer must turn back here.

The third member of our expedition is an American who is to take Major Yeats-Brown's place. He has come up from Calcutta and should be a valuable man in case we get into a tight corner where it is necessary either to fight or squirm our way out. He is David King, a picturesque soldier of fortune. King, who had not yet finished Harvard in 1914, was travelling in Switzerland when the war broke out and immediately joined the Foreign Legion. From the first day of the war to the last he fought with that famous organization in nearly every

important battle. He was wounded many times, saw all his friends fall, and was himself buried alive for thirty-six hours at Verdun. Since the war he has been representing American jute interests in India. But if we have any difficulty in Afghanistan, King should be the ideal man to pull us through.

Niam Shah, an Afridi, is the fourth member of our party. His home is in the mountain fastness of the independent tribal territory lying between the North-West Frontier Province and Afghanistan, and his people do not pay allegiance either to the Amir or to the British *raj*. Niam Shah is a swarthy giant and an Afghan soldier of fortune. During the World War, when he heard that there was a good fight going on in another part of the globe, he came down from his mountain home, joined the British-Indian army, and served in German East Africa and Mesopotamia. He knows two English words, "Naughty boy!" which he repeats, shaking his forefinger; and he says his prayers five times a day and is an excellent man to put the fear of God into the hearts of mobs that often follow at the heels of a European when he ventures into the bazaar of an Indian city.

We gained some insight into the type of home training that Niam Shah had when we visited his Afridi village. There we met his little brother, Ahmed. It seems that Ahmed had had a still younger brother, named Nadir. One day the two quarrelled, and Ahmed ended the argument by disembowelling Nadir with a knife. "Fine work, plucky lad!" said the patriarchs of the Adam Khel.

Incidentally, we brought Niam Shah back to Europe with us upon our return from Afghanistan. He was so handsome and striking in his native costume that I thought he might be useful as an attendant in the foyer of the Royal Opera House in London, during my next season at Covent Garden. But when we got him to London, we had a hard time keeping him happy. He pined for his home in the Afghan mountains. The best way we found to amuse him was to take him to the Zoo. As soon as he came near the cages where the tigers were kept they would leap against the bars and sniff the air and roar as though they knew someone from home had come to pay them a call. Niam Shah also liked Piccadilly Circus. He would stand for hours watching the women go by. To see all women

unveiled was a new experience for him. As a matter of fact, he gave us considerable trouble. If he stayed at a boarding-house and any woman smiled at him—even a waitress—he thought it was a sign that she wished to offer herself as a concubine. In Central Asia, of course, though no man speaks to any woman outside his own harem, and the Koran allows him only four wives, he may have as many concubines as he likes. Life in London was a puzzle to Niam Shah, and after six months I sent him back to Peshawar.

This same Niam Shah, our giant Afridi body-guard, even now slips noiselessly upstairs to remind us that the hour grows late and that if we are to change our Indian rupees for Afghan money, we must be on our way across the city. So with much salaaming we leave the balcony of Abdul Ghani, the Peshawari, and mingle with the swarthy tribesmen of the town. We stop for a moment in the bazaar while Niam Shah does a bit of shopping, and watch the swaggering Pathans buy gold-threaded slippers to adorn their calloused feet. The shops of Peshawar are famous throughout Asia. Indeed, why should they be otherwise in this vast caravanserai, this rich cosmopolitan city, which is both a market

of Hindustan and a market of Central Asia, and where the camelmen from Khorasan and the merchants from Samarkand meet *babus* from Bengal and even occasional buyers from far-off Europe and America? It is indeed a city where the ends of the world are met, but withal one in which sounds, sight and smells are of the East.

Shopping is a carnival of prodigality with Niam Shah and his fellow-countrymen. The Pathan does his wife's shopping as well as his own, on slap-dash, spendthrift lines. Niam Shah cheerfully spends a month's salary (we pay him sixty rupees, about £4) on an amulet or a pair of gold-embroidered shoes. The best of everything is good enough for him. If he doesn't know where his next week's food is coming from, he trusts in the Merciful and Compassionate, and thinks how well he will look in that gorgeous pair of loop-the-loop shoes or that green velvet waistcoat. Then, if there is anything left, he will wager it on a fighting-quail.

Some of the houses have survived since the time when Hari Singh and the Sikhs took Peshawar from the Afghans a hundred years ago, and the foundations of a few may even date from the days when the hordes of Mohammed of

Ghor, of Jenghiz Khan, Hulagu and Timur the Tartar debouched over the plains of India, seven or eight centuries ago. But where are the palaces and monuments and mosques that might for a moment detain the eye of the passing traveller? Here is no great edifice built of stone by the hands of faith, nothing noble or permanent, no comment on immortality carved into the walls or on the pillars of tombs. Peshawar is a draggled daughter of joy who hails each passer-by with the same voice and remembers the face of no man. To-morrow or the next day, all the structures seem to say, we shall be gone. Here within twelve miles of a cirque of blue mountains that will guard the north-west frontier of Hindustan until the world tumbles into cataclysmic night, here at the mouth of the most important strategic valley on the planet, Peshawar huddles with an air as temporary as a resting camel-train, a city where no one seems really to live.

And the thousand and first sin of her people? That is the sin of faithlessness. The Pathans of Peshawar seem utterly fickle. As their city wears no single garment of permanence, so her inhabitants have no ethical stability. They are rich,

and their city is rich. The material for building soundly is in their hands, but not in their hearts. Peshawar is an open mart for all Asia, and the Peshawaris deal with all who pass this way in things that can be bargained for, but virtues are carried away unseen.

Peshawar was not always a mere caravanserai. Just as Cairo was preceded by Memphis and On, where Moses, Pythagoras, and Euclid sat at the feet of the wise men of ancient Egypt, just as mighty Babylon and Ur of the Chaldees were great centres of civilization thousands of years before the caliphs built their mosques and palaces and laid the foundations of Bagdad, so also modern Peshawar was preceded in this remote region of Asia by magnificent cities that were the capitals of empires. Sir John Marshall, then director-general of the department of archæology of the Government of India, strode with me over the ruins of three great cities, each built on the ruins of the other, not many miles from here. He kicked the soil and picked up a coin with the likeness of Alexander on one side, a coin minted by highly civilized people who lived and loved and laboured here a thousand years before Columbus discovered America. Sir John told

me that he and his associates are excavating near Peshawar the capital of the great kingdom of Gandhara, which welcomed uncounted hosts of Buddhist pilgrims more than fifteen centuries ago. When Alexander, on the greatest raid of all time, came crashing through the Khyber weeping for more worlds to conquer, he found a powerful Indian monarch with a vast array of horse, foot, chariots, and war-elephants blocking his way here.

Just how long armies have been camping in Peshawar Plain, the plain that has resounded to the tramp of so many hundreds of thousands of British soldiers, no man knows; but probably ever since the "black-skinned fiends", the negroid aborigines of the Sanskrit Vedas, vainly tried to stem the tide of Aryan invasion something like four thousand years ago. Manhattan Island, the gateway to America, was largely wilderness two hundred years ago; Peshawar Plain, the gateway to Central Asia, has been a centre of civilization for more than twenty times two hundred years. Nevertheless, when we return from the native walled city to the British military cantonment, we must spend the night under canvas, and around us is a barbed-wire barricade,

charged with electricity. Outside our tent an armed sentry paces up and down to keep marauding tribesmen, not, perhaps, from murdering us, but from slipping in and carrying off our clothes—even to the sheets that are under us. The soldiers camping near-by sleep with their rifles chained to their legs. Four thousand years of civilization, with this result! What are the lessons that the ancients failed to learn that might have enabled their civilizations to survive? If we but knew the full story, the accurate history of all that has happened here, should we be able to save our own civilization from a like fate? Or must the history of each civilization be the same in the end? Birth, growth, and death; the perpetual conflict, the elemental struggle to survive the sweep of the nomad from the mountains to the lush pasturelands of the plains, the growth of luxurious cities—and decay?

"Life is but an hour," said Akbar, the great Mogul who travelled this very same road we are about to follow. So after all, what better way could we devise for spending our hour of life than to see as much of this world as possible before passing to the next? To-morrow at dawn the caravans leave for Khyber Pass.

CHAPTER V

KHYBER PASS : THROUGH THE VALLEY OF SUDDEN DEATH

It was on a sizzling hot July morning that we set off from Afghanistan. As we motored across the plain from Peshawar to Fort Jamrud and Khyber Pass, the intensity of the sun made us feel as if we were crossing the floor of the crater of Mount Vesuvius or the bottom of the nethermost pit. It was just the day on which Peshawar's summer average of a hundred heat-strokes and sunstrokes between dawn and sunset was sure to be maintained. It was also the one day when we were particularly anxious to avoid all tropical maladies, because on this day we hoped to bring true the dream of two long years and penetrate the hitherto forbidden country of Afghanistan.

Although I have always been lucky enough to escape strokes and am therefore unable to discuss either heat-stroke or sunstroke from actual personal experience, I have been on speaking terms

with both kinds quite often enough in Arabia, the Sudan, and India to realize that there is a curious difference between the two. When the first one strikes you, instead of getting hotter and hotter, you suddenly find yourself covered with goose-flesh and your teeth chatter and you begin to rave. When the other one hits you, your skin feels as if it were on fire, and then everything goes black and you lapse into a state of semi-coma. Both are frequently fatal. When I have been crossing the Nubian Desert, the Sind Desert, or the sands of Sinai, I have tried desperately to avoid thinking of the danger of either sunstroke or heat-stroke. This seemed to me the best way to ward them both off. At any rate, we had quite enough to occupy our minds all the time we were in Afghanistan without worrying about the intense heat.

Hot as it was around Peshawar, where often the temperature rises much farther above one hundred degrees than one cares to contemplate, we knew that before reaching Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, lying two hundred miles west of us across the Afghan Desert and four ranges of barren mountains, we were going to have to survive temperatures a lot worse. Naturally we

were starting out as thoroughly prepared as possible. Draped over the backs of unusually thick Cawnpore pig-sticker sun-helmets, Chase, King and I wore enormous sun-protectors. They were khaki-coloured pads that hung down to protect the base of the brain and the top of the spine, particularly sensitive areas of the human anatomy. Under our coats we each wore another long pad to prevent the rest of our rapidly weakening spinal columns from melting and oozing away. This one was called a spine-pad. During the World War, every British Tommy or officer who fought out in the desert of Mesopotamia (which must have been a much cooler place in the days when it was the Garden of Eden, before the fall of Adam) was compelled to wear one. If he failed to wear his spine-pad he was court-martialled. Then, in addition to all this, we wore heavy clothing to *keep out the heat*! In doing so we were merely following the well-known example of those poor mortals who stoke furnaces on liners in the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean and who must endure temperatures almost beyond the limit of human imagination. We also, of course, wore special amber glasses to cut the glare of the sun.

Niam Shah, our giant Afridi, who was going along to Kabul as our private bodyguard, did not bother about all these funny Feringhi folderols. He scorned them, and he would twirl his fierce moustachios and smile in a superior manner as he looked at us, all dressed up as though we had just arrived from Mars. The natives, unless city-dwellers, dress exactly in the same fashion all the year round, except that they throw off their voluminous sheepskin postins during the hot summer months. True, the Afridi national headdress, which consists of a tall cone-shaped cap with a turban ten yards long wound round it, is almost as good protection against the fire of the Central Asian sun as the clumsy pith sun-helmet invented by the foreign *sahibs* whom the Indian agitator has of late been wont to refer to as the "satanic British". But Niam Shah suffered more from the heat than we did, despite his superior smile and despite the fact that his face was the colour of lava, that he had lived in this country all his life and was a sinewy, powerful mountaineer of far stronger physique than any of us three.

The Afghan townsman, in contrast to the hillman, seems to be even more subject to the

effects of the sun than the hated Feringhi. In fact, during our stay in Afghanistan, one of the members of the Amir's staff, while accompanying us, crumpled up from sunstroke. It was the day the Amir called out some twenty thousand soldiers for us to review. The ceremonies lasted longer than was expected, because of the zeal of Harry Chase, who made the soldiers march and countermarch for the benefit of the infernal cinema-machine he was operating. The review lasted right on through the heat of the noon hour, when the wise Oriental usually betakes himself to his string *charpai*, or bed, on the shady side of his house. Feizi Mohammed Khan, who was standing next to me, kept getting redder and redder, but, not wanting us to know how he felt, he pluckily stuck it out. That night he collapsed, and when we left Kabul several days later he had not yet recovered.

Every few miles on our way across the plain from Peshawar to Fort Jamrud, we passed stone structures marked "Heat-Stroke Hut". These are for travellers who break down while trekking along the caravan route or for British Tommies who are establishing the *Pax Britannica* among the warlike peoples of this remote and turbulent

corner of far-flung empire. Incidentally these heat-stroke huts have been built by the same "satanic British" who have made India the third country in the world from the standpoint of railroad development, who have here launched the greatest irrigation projects on earth, as a result of which famines in India are becoming fewer and fewer and who have brought to Hindustan an era of peace and prosperity that has caused the country materially to increase in population in the past century.

At the rim of the sun-baked plain we are crossing rise the jagged summits of the snow-capped Safed Koh, biting holes into the cloudless sky. Beyond lies Afghanistan. But to reach the realm of his Majesty the Amir, who has invited us to visit his court, we first have to penetrate those formidable mountains.

To do this we are to travel through the historic Khyber Pass, the most famous and the most strongly fortified mountain gorge on earth, at the far end of which is the sign proclaiming that here travellers must turn back because "It is Absolutely Forbidden to Cross This Border into Afghan Territory". But this time we are going to disregard both the sign and the frontier

guards; for we have permission from the Amir, as well as the Viceroy of India, to enter the kingdom of the warlike Afghans.

It is not safe to linger too long, however, on our way through the grim gorse that connects the vast empire of Hindustan with the plateaux of Central Asia. The Afridis of the Khyber, hillmen with accurate rifle-aim and sensitive trigger-fingers, are a bloodthirsty lot, and, as we whirl through the pass, if we have a blow-out and fail to reach one of the many military camps before dusk, we can never be precisely certain at what moment a rifle-bullet may put a crease or two in our sun-helmets.

> The flying bullet down the Pass,
> That whistles clear: "All flesh is grass." . . .
>
> A scrimmage in a Border station—
> A canter down some dark defile—
> Two thousand pounds of education
> Drops to a ten-rupee jezail.

Nor do these border tribesmen waste many bullets in playfully creasing your hat-brim with their long-barrelled, ten-rupee jezails. The picturesque, ivory-inlaid musket of Kipling's day has now been replaced by thoroughly modern

Lee-Enfield or Martini-Henry rifles, quite as good as those the British have and quite as business-like. In fact, most of them have been stolen from the British.

In twenty minutes we reach Fort Jamrud, a huge, dreadnought-shaped fortress just ten and a half miles west of Peshawar. Although the pass really does not begin for another two miles, Fort Jamrud is the virtual entrance to it here at the eastern, or Indian, end. When the fort was captured by Hari Singh, the commander of Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh military genius of a hundred years ago, it was rebuilt in the shape of a modern battleship. Because of its wireless tower, the resemblance at a little distance is the more striking. The walls are more than ten feet thick. The gates are bastioned, so that if you batter one down you have still another to break through before you penetrate even the outer wall. Inside that, there is still a second massive wall. A fort of this kind would not last ten minutes, of course, against modern artillery, but the frontier tribesmen have nothing but rifles, and the Amir of Afghanistan as a potential enemy, would never be able to drag his mountain guns through the Khyber Pass to

the Fort Jamrud end. So the old Sikh fortress serves its purpose and incidentally provides excellent barracks, headquarters for the staff, and a site for an ammunition depot. Just outside the fort is a high-walled caravanserai, where the weekly caravans that pass to and fro along the Golden Road to Samarkand can stop for the night.

As we approach, a British Tommy waves a red flag and orders us to halt. He stands in a little sentry-box, which gives him meagre shelter from the sun. As he examines the pass that permits us to travel in Afghanistan, he tells us that it is " 'otter than 'ell" and that he wishes he were "back in Blighty at his 'ome in 'Ull on the good old 'Umber". Believe me, these British lads who go off to distant corners of the empire and spend the best days of their lives in keeping peace among peoples who would normally be at one another's throat and who for the most part do not appreciate peace and prosperity —even when they have it—deserve much better pay than they get. They ought to have a share in those fat dividends that the British capitalists back home get from their jute-mills, their cotton and their rich commerce in rice and tea.

As we enter the Khyber, the road begins to wind up and up. We notice a second road running parallel to the one over which we are motoring. That is for the camel caravans, the strings of asses, mules, bullocks, and shaggy ponies, and the scraggly medley of travellers passing this way twice each week. Sometimes we see a third road. That one is for the heavy motor-lorries and troops, when the frontier is aflame with red war and the Khyber echoes to the tramp of marching battalions of Gurkhas, Sikhs, Punjabis, and Rajputs. Sometimes along the cliffs above us, and again down in the cañon below, we see an aerial cableway, the sort of thing the troops that fought across the tops of the Alps during the World War called a "teleferic". Baskets of supplies go swinging along this cableway all day long. It is used in connection with the work of blasting out the bed of the military railroad that is being built right up to the Afghan frontier.

Ahead of us on a lofty peak is Fort Maude. Here and there on the peaks beyond we see more forts and pickets with anti-aircraft and other long-range guns. Soldiers are wigwagging from one mountain-top to another. We pass squads of

Gurkhas with their rifles across their shoulders. Staff-cars whirl by, just as they used to do along the roads back of the Hindenburg Line near Ypres and Dead Man's Corner and along the highway from Bar-le-Duc to Verdun. Occasionally an armoured car passes, or a train of motor-lorries. But the camel caravans and the hook-nosed tribesmen with bulging turbans and loop-the-loop shoes remind us that we are in Central Asia and not "somewhere in France". Beyond the cliffs of Rohtas we come to Shagai Ridge, and then drop steeply down into the narrowest part of the Khyber.

It was here, near the fort of Ali Masjid, that young Yakub Khan shot the sniper. The tale is nearly as old as the rugged bluffs of the pass. But it is true and gives us an insight into the character of the border tribesmen whose proud boast it is that they are the freest men on earth. Among them are those who would rather take pot-shots at the British than take wages for honest work. During the seventy-five years on the North-West Frontier of India, the British have done a great deal of road-building in the Khyber Pass, and, both to keep the Afridi and Mohmand tribesmen out of mischief and to lure

them into laying their rifles aside for shovels, have offered big wages—not always with success. There was one lone sniper, up here in the crags above Ali Masjid, who for weeks kept picking off British soldiers and officers with monotonous and nerve-racking regularity. For a month a reward of a thousand rupees had been offered on the head of the sniper, dead or alive. But no one could claim it, and the wily old sharp-shooter, with his single-shot long-barrelled jezail, kept accounting for two or three soldiers a week and many animals by night. At last a young tribesman who was serving with the Khyber Militia, a guileless-looking lad—"milk-faced", as the Pathans say—with down on his cheeks, volunteered to put an end to the nuisance. So confident of his powers did young Yakub Khan seem that he was given special leave for the day. He set out early in the morning, and before the sun was well over the heights of Shagai the camp heard a single shot ring out among the mountains. A neighbouring picket reported by telephone that the body of an old man—evidently the sniper—had been seen rolling down the hillside. Yakub Khan had brought down his bird and became the hero of the hour. After

paying him the reward, the British political agent in charge of the Khyber congratulated him warmly. But Yakub merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "I don't deserve any credit," said he. "You see, I had no trouble in finding him, because I knew all his little ways. He was my father."

Few places have seen more murders or violent deaths than this pass, leading from India of the fecund millions through the Safed Koh range to the wild uplands of Afghanistan and Bokhara. It is the funnel through which India's ravishers have poured ever since history began. This road we are traversing is assuredly one of the oldest highroads on earth. Over it came the migrating hordes of early Aryans, the first invading white men to be disgorged upon the plains of India. If these walls and frowning cliffs could speak, what tales they could tell! Our knowledge of those early Aryans is almost as vague as our information regarding the inhabitants of Mars. But when they came they cursed India with a system that bids fair to keep some two hundred and fifty million Hindus in bondage for centuries to come. This blight in caste, originally a colour barrier set up between the light-skinned invaders

and the dark aborigines, to-day an elaborate social order in which more than fifty million human beings are relegated to a status on the same level with dogs and pigs, and the body of Hindu society, from an economic point of view, is stratified. Perhaps the early Aryans who passed this way were not to blame. Perhaps it was the climate of India that worked the harm.

After the Aryans came other hordes of whom we know little, until one day the walls of this same gorge resounded to the tramp of soldiers led by the greatest warrior that ever lived. Our admiration for Alexander the Great, here among these barren mountains in remote Central Asia, increases immeasurably. When we recall that we are not merely some hundreds of miles from Europe but several thousand, it seems incredible that more than twenty-two hundred years ago Alexander could have led a great army all the way from Macedonia, overthrown the Persian Empire, crossed Afghanistan, and journeyed through this same Khyber Pass to India.

After Alexander came Parthians, Scythians, White Huns, and Afghans, all eager to shake the gold-mohur tree of Hindustan. Mahmud of Ghazni made something like seventeen

expeditions into India from Afghanistan. Because of his mania for smashing the hideous images of the four-armed Kali, or Hanuman the monkey-god, of Ganesh with his body of a man and head of an elephant, and all the rest of the Hindu deities, he has been called by history the Idol-Breaker. Timur the Tartar rode down this gorge, swept like a fire across the plains of northern India, sacked Delhi, massacred a hundred thousand men, women, and children, looted temples and palaces, and then swept back to the plateau of Central Asia whence he came. But as soon as one host had come and gone through the Khyber, another was at its heels. Baber, the Turkoman descendant of the bloodthirsty Timur, next overran India with his tribesmen and founded the Mogul dynasty. Akbar, most celebrated of all the Mogul emperors, polo-player, warrior, statesman, philosopher, and visionary who vainly sought to supplant Hinduism and Mahommedanism with a new religion of his own, rode back and forth through this gorge at the head of his army.

Finally came the British, and during the past hundred years the story of the Khyber has been writ large in the annals of history, just as it was

for thousands of years before and will be for a hundred centuries to come. It is still by far the most important pass in all Asia, if not in the world. Sooner or later the Government of India will weaken as a result of the present policy of giving India to the Indians, for India is not one nation, but fifty nations. The three hundred and twenty million people speak eighty different languages. They cannot understand one another, and have no more in common than have Finns and Sicilians. A land like this must necessarily fall an easy prey to any invading army. Afghanistan is a strong power on the immediate border. The Afghans are warlike mountaineers. They are envious of the British in India, and one day they will surely sweep down and overrun the plains of Hindustan, just as their ancestors did, unless meantime the millennium should chance on earth. In 1919, shortly after his succession, the Amir of Afghanistan tried actively to menace India but did not get so far as the Khyber.

Just beyond the narrow walls of Ali Masjid Gorge the Khyber opens out into a wider valley, dotted with the fortified villages and high watch-towers of the Zakka Khel, an unruly clan of the

Afridis. Here we caught up with a caravan of merchants returning to Samarkand. Each man was astride a diminutive donkey. The string of camels at the rear was loaded with bales of cotton, bought with the proceeds from the sale of silks from Bokhara and rugs from Khiva, which had been brought down to India a few months before.

Spring and autumn are the best times in which to see the caravans trekking through the Khyber. In both seasons, Chase and I, who have been through the Khyber Pass many times, have lived with the British garrisons at Ali Masjid, Landi Kotal, and Landi Khana, and have watched the progress of one of the greatest annual migrations in the world.

CHAPTER VI

ALONG THE GOLDEN ROAD TO SAMARKAND

WHEN the winter of the Afghan uplands sets in, the gypsy nomads of Central Asia migrate with their black goat's-hair tents, their families, flocks, and fleas, to the plains of India, where they sell their labour as road-makers, well-diggers, or house-builders. Not a few of them are excellent masons; not a few are first-class thieves. Then, when spring comes, they gather up their belongings and such new possessions as have been added into them, from babies to baksheesh, and set their faces toward the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs, for the Indian sun blazes down with such blistering ferocity that there is no more grass for their animals. I have watched these people for days, and there is no greater human pageant than theirs to be seen anywhere.

When spring-time flushes the desert grass,
The kafilas wind through the Khyber Pass.
Lean are the camels but fat the frails,
Light are the purses but heavy the bales,
As the snowbound trade of the North comes down
To the market-square of Pershawur town. . . .

And the picketed ponies, shag and wild,
Strained at their ropes as the feed was piled,
And the bubbling camels beside the load
Sprawled for a furlong adown the road;
And the tribesmen bellowed to hasten the food;
And the camp-fires twinkled by Fort Jumrood;
And there fled on the wings of the gathering dusk
A savour of camels and carpets and musk,
A murmur of voices, a reek of smoke,
To tell us the trade of the Khyber woke.

From one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand tribesmen pass back and forth each year. See them as they go! With their hairy Bactrian camels, their asses and their bullocks, they shuffle along the Golden Road to Samarkand.

Once we followed one of those camel caravans (*kafilas*, as they are called) all the forty-odd miles from the *serai* at Peshawar to the borders of Afghanistan. There must have been ten thousand nomads on the march that day, and along with them trekked thousands of camels and fully ten thousand donkeys, bullocks, and sheep. By the time the little Afghan maiden at the end of the caravan and her brother Gul Must were leaving the *serai* at Peshawar, the head of the *kafila* had already marched seven miles across the plain toward Jamrud. That was in the freshness of the morning. In the heat of the

day, the caravan had straggled out fifteen dusty miles, through the gorge at Ali Masjid on the way to the caravanserai at Landi Kotal.

At the head of the *kafila* march the Khassadars, the local force that has been organized by the British to help police the Khyber and guard the caravans since the regular troops took over the occupation of the pass from the Frontier Militia in 1919. The Khassadars, under their own headmen and furnishing their own arms, draw British pay for their work of protecting the caravans. This plan does away with the problem of military desertions.

Just behind the Khassadars comes a mob of early risers, chiefly wild-looking, beggarly Provindahs, mixed up with pack-mules, donkeys, and a few fakirs—emissaries of the Amir; who knows?—in crazy-quilts. These Provindahs, or gipsy merchants, belong to an Afghan tribe that for centuries has handled most of the trade between Central Asia and India. Their homes are in the mountains around Ghazni, an Afghan city on the famous road from Kabul to Kandahar. So poor are they—or so poor do they wish to seem, for if you search them you may find Golconda diamonds, pigeon's-blood rubies from

Burma, aquamarines from Ceylon, and pearls from the Persian Gulf—that, instead of wearing their shoes, they save the leather by carrying them on their heads, together with faggots of firewood wherewith to cook their evening meal.

Behind these, a venerable greybeard staggers along with a heavy mattress on his head; apparently it is the sum total of his worldly possessions. As he squats down on his heels for a moment's rest, we ask him where he is bound for, and he mumbles something in his heard about Mazar-i-Sharif and the tomb of Ali, which he hopes to see once more before he dies, unless Allah wills that his bones shall bleach among these accursed rocks of the Khyber.

Here come some children on little donkeys. They are tied on to their mounts and are fast asleep, nodding as if their heads would come off. With them is a lad of ten, riding a black and white bull, which looks with disapproval on the wilderness we are traversing. To judge by his sleek sides, he has come from the lush pastures of Bengal. On other camels and bullocks and donkeys come chickens, ducks, lambs, dogs, pots, skillets, and samovars, tied on like the children.

And the Persian pussy-cats, brought for sale,
Spat at the dogs from the camel-bale.

Now come more camels, stretching along as far as the eye can reach. They walk as if they are in carpet-slippers, these rubber-necking camels, and they curse their drivers, their companions, Chase and his grinding camera, their burdens and life in general, with deep-throated ante-diluvian curses—curses that, if one comes to think of it, are not unreasonable. Consider the long, hot, languid hours that they are made to work and the huge, clumsy bales that they are obliged to carry!

Perched high upon mountainous saddles, under which amble sturdy Kabuli ponies, come a score of slant-eyed, Turki-speaking, flat-faced Uzbegs, who have just returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca, made by the sea route from Karachi. They sit proudly in their lofty saddles and survey their fellow-travellers with haughty scorn; for have they not made the long journey to the Prophet's tomb in Medina, have they not walked seven times round the Kaaba in Mecca, kissed the holy stone, and drunk of the waters of Zemzem? To the name of each is now added the title of *hadji*, or holy man. So indeed they

have reason to be proud, and when they get back to their homes in far-away Khokand they will bow the knee to no man, be he a Bolshevist general from Moscow or a Chinese mandarin from Peking.

More donkeys, another mile of grumbling camels, and a second delegation of scraggly, ragged, flea-bitten Provindahs. In contrast to these, a young beau swaggers along with a rose stuck in the curls over his left ear, a long ceremonial coat, trimmed with light blue embroidery, a jewelled dagger, and lace trimmings at the end of his pyjamas. It is sad to see such a dashing cavalier afoot amid the dust: a white stallion would suit him well, but he is horseless, haggard, a trifle footsore. The hashish dens of Peshawar, no doubt, could tell us his story.

And last of all come the little girl and her brother. This girl is not as the other women of the Pathans are, erect, free-striding, self-confident, even though veiled. She walks timidly, with head downcast. She is tied by a long string to her brother, Gul Must. She is quite blind. Very slowly and carefully they go on their long journey home to a village near Kabul, whence they came nine months ago. That was before the

garnerer for graveyards took their widowed mother to join their father by the fountains of paradise.

Here, journeying through the historic Khyber with us, are the people of Central Asia. As they pass in review, we see rich and poor, halt and hale, Turkomans, Tartars, Afghans, Provindahs, Persians, Hazaras, all unchanged since the days when Timur, Scourge of God, levied his soldiers from their ranks and turned northern India into a shambles. It is a pageant of primitive types such as we are not likely to see elsewhere, even if we live as long as Mahalaleel, the great grandsire of Methuselah.

To-day, as we journey toward the frontier on our way into Afghanistan, we do not encounter any vast migration such as we have seen before. For it is the end of July, and the nomads and their flocks are already in camp far up on the plateaux of Central Asia. Occasionally we pass a special caravan of merchants and traders from far-off Khorasan and Shiraz a thousand miles away. They are journeying in company with travellers from Herat, the walled city on the western border of the Amir's realm, and with other merchants from Turkestan. Since

prehistoric times, caravans like these have wound their crawling way through the gorges of the Khyber. They have been raided, scattered, looted; yet the trade goes steadily on. Commerce has a habit of outliving its despoilers.

Before reaching the Loargi plateau, the highest point in the Khyber, we pass several villages of the Zakka Khel Afridis. We whirl past women with earthen jars or bundles of faggots balanced on their heads. As we turn to look at them, they draw their black cloaks over their faces. They are accustomed to seeing Feringhis whirl by in high-powered cars and pay little more attention to us than to a string of burbling camels. But their baggy pantaloons of scarlet cloth are a reminder that life has its exciting moments for them, as well as for the British soldiers who garrison the forts on the surrounding peaks. When there is a blood-feud raging, as there is most of the time, these flaming red trousers are the best protection that the women of the Zakka Khel have. Among the border tribesmen it is considered a disgrace to shoot a woman. But were it not for this age-old custom of having the women wear pantaloons of scarlet, how could a sniper crouching

behind a lump of lava on a distant crag tell one sex from the other? Nor do the men of the Zakka Khel ever wear red to protect themselves while working in the fields of maize and millet. No self-respecting Pathan would dream of falling so low as that. If a whining rifle bullet finds a billet in his heart, thus adding one more tally to the game-book of his blood-enemy, it is simply kismet, the will of Allah.

They tell a story regarding one of these Khyber villages, where fighting had gone on year after year between Zakka Khel families living on opposite sides of the same street. Each faction had an ancient cannon, a relic of the wars between the Sikhs and the Afghans before the day of the British *raj*. Between them they had a total of thirty-two cannon balls. First one side had all the ammunition, but, in the course of a few weeks, the other, after picking the balls off roofs and out of walls where they had lodged, had its innings. Whichever side happened to have the ammunition was in the ascendant for the moment. The casualties were not much greater than they used to be on an America college gridiron in the days of mass-plays and flying wedges when one full-back would chew

the ear off the captain of the other team.

Even though the fighting in the Khyber hills has its humorous side, the story of the pass is a record writ in blood. Every night at dusk the pass is closed to all traffic, and all those who look forward to seeing another day are careful to spend the night behind the walls of a fort or a caravanserai. At the time of my last visit the murder of two postal clerks took place a few miles back, midway between Fort Jamrud and Ali Masjid Gorge. The mails are carried back and forth in military cars through the pass to the various military camps. On this particular occasion the car returning from Landi Kotal to Jamrud was a little late. A band of brigands lay in wait behind a boulder at one of the few points where the road in the Khyber cannot be seen by the lookouts from one of the many forts. As the car swung round the bend, the brigands fired. The two postal clerks in the rear seat were killed outright. The native driver was badly wounded. Both the mail-bags and the chauffeur were yanked out of the car. So far as I know, the mails were never heard of again. By the time troops had arrived from the nearest post, the outlaws had disappeared up

a *nullah*. They held the driver for ransom and got it. Pastimes of this type are very popular with the border tribes. Even at the present day the pernicious trade of kidnapping people from the cities of the plains is one of the greatest problems the British have to face.

The Khyber Pass is some twenty-seven miles long. Two-thirds of the way through from Jamrud we enter a high-walled fort. The British sentries swing back the iron-studded gates and snap to attention as we drive through in search of water for our boiling radiator. They mistake us for officers of the Indian Army and direct us to the office of the commandant. The general who comes out to welcome us is a clean-cut Englishman, the commandant of all the troops in the pass. He invites us to spend the night, but we explain that we want to get as far into Afghanistan that day as possible. When he hears that we are actually on our way to the Amir's capital, he looks amazed, says he would give anything to go along, and adds that he hopes we will get back alive. He seems rather dubious about it. Regarding the road, he says the reports are that many miles of it have been washed away by the summer floods and that

there are long desert stretches where we shall have to plough through deep sand. He recommends that we abandon our car and buy a string of camels.

This general, incidentally, has the reputation of being a modern Solomon. Many of the officers on his staff in the Khyber are married, and most of their wives live at Dean's Hotel, in Peshawar. Tired of being left alone, the wives, after holding a council of war, once sent a petition to the general, begging him to allow them to share their husband's hardships. Now women have never been allowed in the Khyber, and of course they all knew that what they asked was strictly against army orders. But the general was a keen student of the ways of womankind. He understood that if he refused them point-blank, they might make the rest of his years of service on the frontier a life of misery. So he invited them to come to Landi Kotal and try it for a while. They came. But at the end of three days they all packed up and went right back to Peshawar. Anyone who has seen the Khyber will understand why. There is nothing there but walls of rock. It is worse even than the shores of the Dead Sea or the very bottom

of the Grand Cañon of the Colorada, because there is not so much as a stream of water to look at to break the monotony.

From Landi Kotal we drove on along the Khyber military highway until we dropped down to Landi Khana, a cluster of tents and stone huts, surrounded by barbed-wire entanglements, at the bottom of the valley within a few yards of the Afghan border. Increasing the speed, King shot us beyond this farthest British camp as if he was afraid someone might come out at the last moment with telegraphic orders from Simla and turn us back.

A moment later we found ourselves facing the famous sign that proclaims: "It is Absolutely Forbidden to Cross This Border into Afghan Territory". On one side stood the frontier guards of the Government of India. Across the line were the soldiers of the Amir. We unrolled our firman, they pulled back the masses of barbed wire that block the western end of the Khyber, and, as we crossed that line, we got the thrill of a lifetime.

Ahead lay a sunbaked plain, shimmering in the heat of a Central Asian summer morning—Afghanistan the forbidden.

CHAPTER VII

WE CROSS THE AFGHAN DESERT

THE thermometer hanging in the sentry-box back at Fort Jamrud, at the eastern end of the Khyber, was not even registering when we had passed by, on an unforgettable July morning, on our way to Afghanistan. The mercury had already reached the top of the bulb two hours after sunrise. Now it was ten o'clock, and the heat was intense enough to curl your hair. Nevertheless, as we crossed over the border of British India and for the first time found ourselves in the little-known Central Asian realm of the Amir of Afghanistan, Chase, King and I all felt an exhilarating, cool sensation along our spines. It was the same sort of thrill that you get the first time you go up in an aeroplane, especially if your flight happens to include, as mine did that first time I played the role of a modern Elijah, looping, nose-diving, and barrel-rolling over historic places

such as Cairo, the pyramids, the Suez Canal, and Mount Sinai. The same sort of thrill, in fact, that comes to you the first time you watch the dance of the mystic northern lights, when across the polar sky "their lancing rays are hurled, like the all-combing searchlights of the navies of the world".

We rounded the first bend and passed out of sight of the famous sign proclaiming it forbidden to cross the border. Now the long arm of British authority was no longer able to reach out and protect us. We had just come through the Khyber Pass, where murders and hold-ups are common occurrences, but, when the last Tommy stationed at Landi Khana, the farthest British outpost, had feebly given us the hundred-degrees-Fahrenheit salute, the danger of whining rifle bullets somehow seemed much more menacing.

King, who was driving, slowed down to light a gasper and remarked that if the blankety-blank caravan track got any rockier we should have to exchange our Buick for a burro or a mountain-goat or two. Chase, always looking at the sunny side of things, cheered us up with the suggestion that it must have been about here that one of the

last Europeans to enter Afghanistan had been murdered.

He was a German, it seems, who had been employed by the Amir on some engineering project in Kabul. He was on his way to India under the protection of an armed escort, just the sort of escort that we too are expecting to pick up a mile or so farther on. Within a few hundred yards of the frontier, the Feringhi engineer had been murdered by the Afghan officer in command of his escort. At the last moment the officer had decided that it really was his religious duty not to let the Christian dog get away alive.

When the news of the murder reached the commandant of the Afghan post at Dakka, the very post toward which we are heading, the commandant, instead of ordering the officer's arrest, praised him in the name of Allah and asked if there had been any witnesses of the deed. He was told that two private soldiers had been present. His advice to the officer of the escort was to shoot them—on the theory that dead men tell no tales. At the same time he promised to back up any report made to the Amir. But the officer thought all this entirely unnecessary.

He fully expected the Amir to promote him or at least present him with a bag of gold and a concubine or two in return for having shot a Christian. As a matter of fact, when word did reach the Amir, he rose up in his wrath and instead of a promotion gave the murderer a ticket to paradise. He had him executed on the very spot where he had so treacherously killed the Feringhi.

Perhaps this act of discipline was a good lesson to all Afghan troops. At any rate we hoped so!

We were in a part of Afghanistan inhabited by the Shinwaris, shaggy-haired, baggy-trousered, truculent nomads, considered dangerous even by the Amir's soldiers. There is a proverb in Afghanistan to the effect that "a snake, a Shinwari, and a scorpion have never a heart to tame". Abdur Rahman, grandfather of the present Amir, was the first Afghan ruler temporarily to succeed in subduing the Shinwaris. He not only waged relentless warfare against them but at Kabul built a tower out of their skulls, as a hint to the other bellicose tribes of his realm.

But in the nine or ten miles between Landi

Khana and Dakka, the first town in Afghanistan, we saw no sign of a living thing, except a soldier who stopped us near a fort a mile or so after we had crossed the frontier. This man might have been one of Villa's bandits holding us up in the mountains of Chihuahua. He wore a disreputable pair of puttees, coarse khaki breeches and shirt, several bandoleers of cartridges, and a nondescript, vizorless cap. Without a word of explanation or greeting or even so much as a smile, he climbed on board. With our heavy load of petrol, oil, water and other supplies, there had been barely room for King, Chase, Niam Shah and me. But the Afghan squeezed in, the springs groaned, and we drove on. The fort from which this soldier had come was high up on a near-by promontory. As we passed out of sight toward Dakka, our new companion's associates sat on the rocks just below the fort, fingering their rifles.

So far, at any rate, we had not met any *ghazis*, and that was encouraging. Now, in Asia Minor, the term "*ghazi*" is used to describe a conqueror. One hears, for instance of Ghazi Mustapha Kemal. But in India, along the Afghan frontier, the term has come to have a different significance.

It is used to indicate a man who goes wild with religious fanaticism and starts out determined to kill an unbeliever. "Going *ghazi*", is an expression coined by Tommy Atkins to describe an Afghan who has decided to assure himself of admission to the Moslem paradise by killing a Hindu, a Parsi, a Jain, a Buddhist, a Jew, or, preferably, a dog of a Christian.

Usually a man who goes *ghazi* is a religious disciple of a *mullah*, or priest, who has been taught, among other things, the following passage from the Holy Book, in the chapter entitled "Repentance": "And when the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods to God wherever ye shall find them; and seize them, beseige them, lay wait for them with every kind of ambush. . . ." Verse 5 of Chapter 9 of the Koran has been responsible for the deaths of many British officers on the frontier.

Some *ghazis* meet their death in battle very gallantly. At Oghi, a far-away post in the mountains beyond Abbottabad, several hundred practically unarmed attacked an entrenched camp, defended with barbed wire and machine-guns. Again, in Waziristan, while a position of the Mahsuds, who are one branch of the Waziri

Pathans, was being shelled, one of the enemy stood up on the entrenchment, in full view of the British guns, and signalled "Right", "Left", "Short", "Over", in derision of British marksmanship, until the guns got the range and ended the joke. Both these incidents happened in the last few years; they show that the spirit of the martyrs of Islam is not dead.

But there is another sort of *ghazi* who gains the crown of martyrdom by murder. About twenty years ago the Mahsuds in Wana Fort—they were a company strong, say, a hundred and twenty men—thought it would be a good plan to kill their British officers and take possession of the fort. They happened to be the inlying picket at the time and consequently were in possession of their rifles and ammunition. Those of the other troops were stacked in the quarter-guard. At eight o'clock of a winter's evening they collected stealthily outside the officers' mess. Two of their number were to go in and shoot the British officers—about six of them had just sat down to dinner—and the sound of firing was to be the signal for a general rising, in which the unarmed troops were to be overpowered. There was nothing to prevent

the scheme from succeeding save the power of an overruling Providence.

The two Mahsuds who had gone *ghazi* stalked into the mess-room with bayonets fixed and hesitated an instant, blinded by the light. The officers looked up from their soup. Colonel Harman rose quickly, scenting the trouble, and told the Mahsuds not to be fools. Before the words were out of his mouth, he was bayoneted. But quick as the Mahsuds were, Captain Plant, the second-in-command, was almost as quick as they, and felled one of them with a blow from which he recovered only when it was the time to be hanged. The remaining officers were able to capture the other *ghazi*, although not before he had wounded Captain Plant in the shoulder. In spite of his wound, which bled profusely, Plant gave orders to the company commanders to turn their men out as quickly as possible, and in a few minutes he had gathered together a hundred armed and loyal men. Meanwhile the rest of the Mahsuds were still waiting round the corner in the dark for the firing that was to herald the mutiny. While they hesitated, of two minds about what to do, Captain Plant and his men surrounded them, disarmed them,

ıd immediately disbanded the company. The *bazis* forfeited their lives.

A few years later a political officer of the rontier was murdered in his sleep by a young Mahsud recruit, who alleged as his reason that he *sahib* slept with his feet toward Mecca and hat he could not allow this insult to his religion :o pass unrebuked.

Another murder, which occurred just before :he World War, was that of Captain Butler of the Guides. Butler was universally beloved by both officers and men of the Wana garrison, of which he was second-in-command. One night however, while a sword-dance was in progress, in honour of a departing Indian officer, a recruit, brooding over his failure in a musketry test, began to consider that fatal verse of the Koran. There in front of him were his officers, sitting in easy-chairs. Swords gleamed in the firelight; men swayed in postures of triumph. There was music that sang to him of the sweetness of paradise, while his pulse beat faster and faster. So the devil entered into him, and he shot Captain Butler in the back and killed him. When he was captured a few seconds later, the beatitude of the martyr shone in his face. "Open

the gates of paradise for me," he shouted.

Nearly all the inhabitants of Afghanistan are orthodox Sunnites, of the same Mohammedan sect to which the King of Irak, and his brother rulers of the Hedjaz and Transjordania belong. According to Afghan tradition, a few years after the inspired camel-driver of Mecca fled to Medina and began to preach in that city, the Afghans sent a delegation to Arabia to investigate the new religion. The members of the delegation, headed by a wise man named Kais, from whom all modern Afghans claim descent, were promptly converted. Upon their return to Afghanistan, they won over their fellow-countrymen to the new faith.

It was nearing noon when we came in sight of Dakka, a walled town on the banks of the Kabul River. Several hundred yards outside the wall, and almost ready to topple over the brink into the swirling water, was a semi-European looking building made of mud. From its roof a flag was flying. Now the design of the royal coat-of-arms and official seal of the Afghan Government consists of the dome and the two minarets of a mosque, with the Mohammedan pulpit in the centre, a banner on each side, and

two crossed rifles underneath. The Afghan flag displays this same design in white upon a jet-black background. From a distance it looks exactly like a skull and cross-bones. We blinked our eyes and wondered if we were approaching the headquarters of some unknown Central Asian descendants of doughty Captain Kidd.

When we pulled up in front of the building, a swarm of bearded tribesmen came out and surrounded the car. One old patriarch, bent with age, a *hadji*, judged by his green turban and henna-dyed beard, salaamed slowly and impressively. Then a smart-looking Afghan officer in black astrakhan cap, Sam Browne belt, and Turkish cavalry boots, came out and welcomed us in the name of His Majesty the Amir.

While we were having tea with the grey-beards, the Afghan officer called Kabul over a private telephone, used for military purposes only. Although the single line connected directly with headquarters in Kabul, it took the colonel nearly two hours to get the announcement of our arrival through to the Amir. It was the heat of the day by now, and the officials, as well as the passing traders and curious tribesmen who

had gathered to look us over, stretched out on *charpais*, or string-beds, on the veranda. The sentries snoozed at their posts. Colonel Abdul Ibrahim Khan alone stayed awake, in order to keep us company.

Through King, who could speak Hindustani rather fluently, he told us much about his country. From our point of view, by the way, very few Afghans have anything but the most meagre education. This commandant at Dakka was an exception. He had gone to college in India and had a fair knowledge of the geography of his country and of the motley array of peoples who live within its borders. He had even a library, consisting of one book. He produced it with the pride of a schoolboy. It was a dog-eared Rand McNally atlas, of the vintage of 1900, brought back from Australia by an Afghan camel-driver. He opened it to a map of the world. Then he pointed out to us that his country was in the same latitude and of almost exactly the same size as a country that he called "Teckass". By "Teckass" we discovered that he was referring to Texas.

Although we had never thought of it before, there really is a rather striking similarity between

Afghanistan and the Lone Star State. For instance, each covers an area of about two hundred and fifty thousand square miles, and each has a population of about five million people. As a matter of fact, the population of Afghanistan is variously estimated at from five to fifteen millions, but a census has never been taken. The Oxus River forms the international boundary between Afghanistan and Bokhara just as the Rio Grande does between Texas and Mexico. Like Texas, also, Afghanistan has five principal centres—Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad.

But Afghanistan, unlike Texas, is landlocked—by Baluchistan to the south; Waziristan, the North-West Frontier Province of India, Swat, Chitral, and Kashmir to the east; Turkistan to the north; and Persia to the west. Vast mountain ranges dominate the country. One of these, the Hindu Kush, includes several ice-capped peaks that look down upon Central Asia from an altitude of twenty-three thousand feet. The country as a whole averages the altitude of Colorado. The capital, Kabul, is a thousand feet higher than our mile-high city of Denver.

There are very few roads in the hermit realm

of the Amir, very few telephones, few electric lights. There are neither telegraph-lines nor railways, and the country does not boast of a single bank. Much of the territory is utterly wild and unexplored.

Yet Afghanistan is to-day one of the most important countries on earth. With the possible exception of Turkey, it is more powerful than any other Mohammedan state. It lies right at the cross-roads of Central Asia and controls nearly all the important avenues of approach to India from the north and from the west. How under the sun it has been able to maintain its aloofness from the rest of the world, in view of its geographical position, is a mystery.

I asked our host, Colonel Abdul Ibrahim, for his explanation. Since apparently he was a man of considerable culture and a full-blooded Afghan, I was curious to hear what he would say. He replied that he thought the policy of isolation had been adhered to largely because his country was inhabited by independent, freedom-loving people, who were always ready to fight for their liberty and who had no intention of being gobbled up by either the British Imperialists to the south-east or the Russians to the north.

By this time we had all consumed so many cups of tea that we were threatened with gastronomic complaints. The colonel and his staff, moreover, had smoked all our English cigarettes. But at last word came through from the Amir that we were to proceed as far as Jalalabad that afternoon and either spend the night there in his winter palace or push on farther to his mountain lodge at Nimlah. Colonel Abdul Ibrahim Khan was to accompany us. His Majesty had spoken. Once he speaks, there is nothing more to be said. His subjects, unless they live in remote and inaccessible mountain districts, must obey his slightest whim. When he elevates his eyebrows, men fall at his feet.

So, with the colonel added to our party, we now had five passengers, averaging about one hundred and fifty pounds each. Besides, there were our thousand pounds of dead-weight in cameras, tins of cinematograph film, tripods, bedding-rolls for four, and special racks of petrol and oil, sufficient for our five-hundred-mile trip to Kabul and back again to Peshawar. This made a load of nearly a ton on an ordinary five-passenger, six-cylinder American touring-car. That would be a terrific amount to carry

even on good roads, but for a journey along a caravan route over a desert, across four mountain ranges, and through washouts—well, I suppose we were optimists to tackle it.

The road we had thus far travelled for nearly fifty miles from Peshawar across the plain to Fort Jamrud, then for twenty-seven miles through the Khyber and on over the border to Dakka, had been excellent, especially as far as Landi Khana, at the edge of the British zone. In their wars with the Afghans the British have on several occasions got to Dakka, and thither artillery and heavy trucks have recently been brought From Dakka on for the next fifty miles to the half-way city of Jalalabad we were scheduled to pass through purgatory and then right on through Hades itself. We had been told that the June and July floods had washed away long stretches of the caravan track and that a motor-car would make no headway at that particular time unless it could leap from boulder to boulder. But in spite of the warnings we did not realize that it was really going to be so bad as it turned out.

For the first few miles we sailed ahead over a flat desert surface through a region devoid

of even enough vegetation to keep a camel alive. All about us were black lava outcrops that made the scene appear all the more desolate. After that came a sandy stretch of ten miles or so; to the right of them rose hills from which a number of nomads came running down to see us careering by.

The heat was appalling. It surpassed anything Chase or I had ever encountered in Arabia, the Soudan, India, or islands along the equator. We thought we had reached the hottest place on earth when we visited the Dead Sea Valley, thirteen hundred feet below sea-level, during the Palestine campaign. Then in India we had crossed the Sind Desert when it was so hot that we had to pack a cloth full of ice around the electric fan in the train. But this Afghan desert was worse than anything we had ever known. If we had broken an axle or otherwise put the car out of commission, we should still, I imagine, be out there in the desert. We did have plenty of trouble as it was.

Imaginative writers who describe the pains of hell tell us that Satan, not satisfied with roasting his victims, has them prodded with pitchforks by his imps. Well, in crossing the

Afghan Desert from Dakka to Jalalabad, we suffered a similar fate. The Old Boy had us tortured not with pitchforks, however, but with millions of sharp-pointed tacks. This caravan route has been used incessantly ever since the Aryans first invaded India, and ever since the armies of Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, and Timur the Tartar passed this way, and more than two hundred thousand camels go up and down it each year. The men who drive these camels are shod with heavy, loop-the-loop slippers, in the bottoms of which are sharp iron tacks with heads as large as the tip of your little finger. When they fall out, they invariably lie head down and point up. If you walk along that caravan route, you kick up three or four of them every time your toe hits the dust. Just imagine what it would be like to drive a car over such a road!

On our entire journey from the Khyber Pass to Kabul and return we averaged a puncture an hour. Fortunately we had taken along four spare tyres and a whole flock of inner tubes and patches. But to hear that ominous *siss* of escaping air or the pistol-shot of a sudden puncture, and then to get out in heat-like blasts from a

furnace—well, it is useless to attempt to describe our feelings. Not even the driver of an Alaskan dog-team or a Missouri mule-skinner or a San Francisco longshoreman could supply adjectives enough to do the subject justice. If you want to experience something similar to what we went through, take your car out to Nevada next July, spray some valley with sharp tacks, and then spend a few days driving back and forth over them. Before we had reached Dakka, we were hoping that no predatory Shinwari would pick us off with his Martini-Henry. But after we had changed tyres a few times in the desert near Jalalabad, Chase said he hoped he would be shot without delay and put out of his misery.

Coming out of the sand for a while, we ran into another patch of boulder-strewn country, where piles of jagged rocks alternated with sand-dunes and deep pits. King's arms were sore for a week after that trip. The poor old car was wrenched, twisted, and shaken until it seemed certain to break in two. It was so heavily loaded that it crouched, as it were, before leaping from one pit or boulder to another. For several hours this terrific racking and pounding

lasted. Then we plunged into hub-deep sand. The more the car laboured to get out the deeper its weight forced the wheels to sink. Finally we removed everything on board, and with a roar the car pushed the sand aside and swung ahead. When we were clear of that particular pit and an equally bad stretch of sand that continued for several hundred yards, King stopped the car on solid ground. Then we had to carry up our half-ton of photographic impedimenta, cans of petrol, and bedding-rolls from the place where we had stalled. Even Niam Shah, our giant Afridi, who ought to have been acclimatized, since he lived only a hundred miles away, nearly crumpled up. As for the rest of us, if we had had another five-gallon can of petrol to go back for, it would be there yet.

We were never many miles from water, and occasionally we passed near enough to the Kabul River or to one of its small tributaries to be able to fill up the radiator. Moreover, every time we emptied a five-gallon can we filled it with water so as to be ready for an emergency.

Nearly as troublesome as the patches of deep sand were the washouts. Into one with a tricky bottom of rolling stones we plunged well

above the axles. Although the Amir is said to have spent vast sums on this caravan-route between Peshawar and Kabul, the floods had destroyed all evidence of upkeep. Apparently no repairs were being either made or contemplated. The East regards public improvements with a phlegmatic eye.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT ON THE OASIS OF JAL-AL-EDDIN

SUDDENLY, about two-thirds of the way from Dakka to Jalalabad, we ran into a simoon, or desert storm. The sky turned copper-coloured and there was a rumble of thunder like the cough of French seventy-fives before an attack. We were passing a small caravan of some fifty camels on their way from Mazar-i-Sharif to India at the moment when the storm came rolling toward us. As it struck the camels, they all knelt with their drivers huddling beside them. The air grew as opaque as the vilest November London fog. The wind passed in twenty minutes. While it blew, however, the flying sand stung our hands and faces like needles, and so much of it penetrated three layers of canvas into the camera-cases that Chase had to take every bit of his intricate apparatus apart when we reached Kabul.

It took us more than four hours to cover that

fifty mile stretch from Dakka to the Amir's palace at Jalalabad. Just before reaching it, we suddenly found ourselves bowling along through a shady avenue. We seemed suddenly to have been shot out of the fire of the nethermost pit into the outer verge of paradise. But we were merely approaching the city whither the Amirs of Afghanistan repair in the winter when Kabul is snow-bound. Jalalabad, which is less than a half-mile above sea-level and has a sub-tropical climate, is surrounded by date-palms, orange groves, pomegranate-orchards, and gardens ablaze with colour. During the hot months its population dwindles down to barely five thousand. But when winter comes in the bleak and snow-bound highlands, from twenty-five thousand to forty thousand Afghans foregather here just as Americans migrate from Chicago to Miami or the Isle of Pines.

The city lies in the midst of a fertile plain, surrounded by carefully tended fields. Here and there throughout the country are rich valleys like this one, oases in what is for the most part a region of vast deserts and towering mountain ranges. On every oasis the dwellers in the valleys have planted artificial avenues of poplar,

cypress, mulberry, ash and willow. The orchards and vineyards of the Afghans are famous throughout Asia. As irrigation experts they are second only to their neighbours in China. They usually raise two crops a year of grain and vegetables, sowing their wheat, barley, and lentils in the autumn and their tobacco, maize, beets and rice in the spring.

Afghan soil is the property of the state. It is divided more or less evenly among the different families, and in order that all may have an equal chance the fields are re-distributed every five or ten years. This is indeed a remarkably democratic system. The principal revenue of the Afghan Government comes from taxes on these lands, on houses, and on grazing rights and from import and export duties. There are not many non-Mohammedans in the country, but all Hindus and others who are permitted to live and trade there must pay a special poll-tax. On the whole the Afghans abhor trades and crafts and look down upon shopkeepers. It is because they can make use of the non-Mohammedans in the dull affairs of business that they allow them to enter the country at all.

Jalalabad was laid out nearly four centuries

ago by Baber in the days before he had conquered India. The town as it stands to-day really dates from the time of Baber's grandson, Akbar, the greatest of the great Mogul rulers of India. Akbar, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, was sometimes known as Jal-al-eddin, a title meaning "splendour of religion", and the city was named after him. During the first Afghan War with the British, the city was held by Sir Robert Sale. His defence of it, from November 1841 to April 1842, is a brilliant episode in British military annals.

As we approached, we could see nothing but the high mud walls that surround the city. We drove direct to the Amir's winter palace, which lies a few hundred yards to the west of the Kabul gate in the centre of a tropical park. With its graceful spires and its light blue walls, it looked from a distance like a palace of gossamer out of fairyland.

After our trip across the desert from India we felt within the Amir's winter residence like modern Aladdins for whom had been conjured up a palace of the Arabian Nights. Each room seemed to have been occupied that very day, yet there was not an attendant visible nor even

a sound save the echoes from our own voices. On the Amir's huge carved Kashmir desk were pen and ink and his personal stationery, bearing the royal Afghan coat-of-arms, and a number of letters in Persian, looking as if a secretary might have placed them there a moment before. Incidentally, Persian is the language of the Afghan court and a more complex language, made up of words taken from many Central Asian tongues and called Pashtu, is the speech of the majority of the people. In the billiards-room balls and cues were on the tables, as if a group of khans had just left their game for a sherbert or a cup of tea in the garden. In the banquet-hall, beneath Gargantuan candelabra that had evidently been brought into the country from France by caravan, were long tables set with heavy cut glass and ready for the Amir and his entourage to file in for a state dinner.

Chase and I intimated to Niam Shah that we purposed also to visit the bazaars within the walls of the city. Looking his fiercest, fingering the ends of his warlike moustachios, and drawing himself up to the full dignity of his six feet three inches, Niam Shah shook his head and replied: "*Sahib*, you no go! Naughty man

shoot!" It seems that the inhabitants of Jalalabad have a particularly unsavoury reputation for treachery. Even the Amir had for some time avoided the city because it was rumoured throughout Afghanistan that there were those in Jalalabad who would like to murder him just as others had made away with his father, Habibullah Khan. Nevertheless we slipped out through the garden with Niam Shah striding wrathfully behind us, and spent an hour in exploring the twisting, narrow streets of the walled city, where live from twenty to thirty thousand of the most hostile people in Afghanistan.

Old Jalalabad—like most of the cities in the remoter parts of Central Asia—is surrounded by a high wall averaging from ten to twenty feet in thickness. The gates are all double or treble-walled, so that if besiegers storm the outer portal they will have a second or third to batter down. Rows of slits near the top serve as loopholes for the defenders. Only modern artillery could raze fortifications so sturdy. Although we had been warned that we might be shot by the fanatical people within, who at that time were supposed to be very sullen

because of dissatisfaction with the Amir's rule, we got back with whole skins and a feeling that the risk had been worth taking. We had had an unmatched view of Oriental life without the slightest modernizing, Western touch—of coffee-sipping merchants, hook-nosed money-lenders, dancing-boys, water-carriers, Mohammedan fakirs —precisely as it had been for untold generations.

Nearly all the men within the wall carried rifles slung over their shoulders. While we took motion-pictures of various scenes—the first films ever exposed in Afghanistan—they crowded about, far too much interested in Chase's cinematograph outfit to bother about being unfriendly. Then, too, Niam Shah's presence, towering above the stalwart Afghans, exerted a wholesome influence, for the Afridi is respected throughout Central Asia.

We found the route from Jalalabad on toward Kabul marked at two-mile intervals by small mud forts, perfectly round, with loopholes in which we instinctively looked for the gleaming muzzles of Afghan rifles. In a gorge near one of these miniature fortresses a British army was almost annihilated about four score years ago. The British had marched to Kabul, and then,

after an agreement had been reached, they were to retire to India in peace. But the Afghan tribesmen changed their minds at the last moment, and a bloody massacre ensued. Both troops and camp-followers were surrounded by concealed assailants. Only one man crawled back to Jalalabad to tell the tale.

It is interesting to know that Alexander the Great was one of the few military commanders who ever really conquered these wild mountain tribesmen. Realizing the necessity for keeping his lines of communication safe while invading India, he spent many months in a ruthless campaign among the Afghan—then called the Bactrian—mountains. So merciless were his methods, and so thoroughly carried into effect, that the tribes remained quiescent throughout the period of fighting in India. To-day, even, his name is not forgotten among them and is used by Afghan mothers to hush their babes.

A short way beyond Jalalabad we fell in with a procession of the Amir's work-elephants and were forced to make way for them; for, although some took the sight of a modern motor-car philosophically enough, now and then one would shy like a frightened camel and go charg-

ing across the fields. Much frantic shouting and running about ensued on the part of the Afghans near-by, since there are many less pleasant situations than being stationed directly in front of an enraged three-ton mass of bone and muscle.

Just after dusk we arrived in front of another walled enclosure, at Nimlah, and, as the gates swung open, drove into another park. Here were more gardens, with fountains and water-terraces and an avenue of symmetrical cypress-trees, somewhat like a miniature Oriental Versailles. These trees, dating from Mogul times, were planted by the great Emperor Jahangir and his still greater Queen, Nur Jahan. The avenue in the gathering dusk resembled the vast nave of an arboreal cathedral.

The Amir's servants salaamed in rows as we pulled up in front of his bungalow, and soon they made us realize again how far we were now removed from Western customs. First a midnight dinner fit for a caliph was cooked. Then eight swarthy servitors with baggy trousers, bulging turbans, and up-turned slippers came through the trees in single file, headed by a sort of captain. He bore no food himself, but each of the others carried a silver salver heaped with

Afghan viands seasoned with spice and garlic. The meal was topped off with juicy water-melon and bunches of luscious grapes. Meanwhile our couches had been prepared on the lawn under the trees. In a circle round us were three groups of soldiers. They were there to make sure that no over-jealous follower of the Prophet took advantage of our visit to slit in the name of Allah the jugular vein of an infidel.

Next morning we were aroused by attendants with cups of tea, and soon we were on our way again. The caravan route grew steadily better with smooth, hard surfacing and easy curves—curves plotted by a "dog of an unbeliever", whom His Majesty's father had employed. After ascending the fourth range of mountains to an altitude of eight thousand feet, we cut off the engine and coasted for nearly ten miles into a valley as fertile and alluring as any we had ever seen. Just ahead of us now lay Kabul, the capital of the largest country in the world, next to Tibet, that has been closed to visitors from the Occident. In another hour our dream of the past two years would come true, and we should be presenting ourselves at the court of His Majesty the Amir of Afghanistan.

CHAPTER IX

KABUL, BROODING CITY OF SUSPICION

PERHAPS we were a bit jumpy the afternoon we drove into Kabul. At any rate there was something about our reception to make us feel that we should be unlikely ever to pick this remote Central Asian city as a place for a holiday. To be sure, the last few hours of our long, hot trip across the Afghan Desert from the Khyber to Kabul had not put us in a particularly cheerful frame of mind. After swinging around the sharp curves of the Jagdalak and the Khurd-Kabul passes, where we had several narrow escapes from plunging off into space, we had to buck a simoon all the rest of the way to our destination, and, when we arrived, our eyes, ears, and noses were full of sand.

Previous experiences in visiting Oriental monarchs had led us somewhat to expect that we should be met by a galloping troop of cavalry or a string of gaily caparisoned elephants or at

least a committee bearing the keys of the city. Usually your arrival in a country where you are to be the guest of the potentate is attended by so much pomp and circumstance as to be embarrassing. But as we passed through the Darwaza Naghara Khana, the Gate of the Trumpet and Drums, we were greeted by neither crash of cymbals nor blare of conches. The guards on the palace walls looked down with sullen indifference, not even saluting us. And the burly Afghans whom we encountered on the street glowered as if for a counterfeit Kabuli rupee they would slit our jugular veins and tear us to pieces.

We passed through the Gate of the Trumpet and Drums and slowed down, wondering which street to take. A policeman in a scarlet tunic and black astrakhan flower-pot hat jumped on the running-board and peremptorily motioned for us to take the turning to the right. A hundred yards farther on a one-horse *tonga* pulled up beside us. The bespectacled driver of this rather ramshackle conveyance was wearing a wing-collar, a flaming red tie, a frock-coat, grey-striped trousers, patent-leather shoes, and *suéde* gloves, all complete, and topped off with a tall

astrakhan *tarboosh*. He had everything but a monocle. Indeed, had he been wearing one, I might easily have mistaken him for his Holiness the Aga Khan, setting forth from the Ritz in London to see his famous filly Mumtaz Mahal win the races at Ascot. Without a word of welcome or a smile, he said, as he pointed to the policeman: "You are to go with this man. He will show you to the quarters that His Majesty has placed at your disposal." His English was flawless, but there was a pained look on his face as he uttered his message.

Later we learned that this serious-looking dignitary was none other than Feizi Mohammed Khan, counsellor of the Foreign Ministry and Advisor to the Amir. How he happened to meet us at that particular spot and why he did not unbend a bit and deign to reveal his own identity remained a mystery to us. We were also considerably puzzled by the Amir's having deviated from all the traditions of his hermit realm by inviting us to his court, only to subject us to a very frosty reception. In discussing the matter that evening among ourselves we concluded that His Majesty must be a "good fellow", but that probably he had overridden the advice

of his counsellors in permitting us to come to Kabul. Hence the attitude of Feizi Mohammed.

At any rate the scarlet-coated police officer directed us to the western edge of the city near a gap between two jagged mountains. There we found the quarters that Feizi Mohammed Khan had indicated. They were not in the Bala Hissar, the fortress where Sir Alexander Burnes and Sir William Macnaghten, British emissaries, were murdered in 1841, and, in 1879, Sir Pierre Louis Napoleon Cavagnari. We were agreeably surprised at being housed in a semi-European-looking, two-story, octagonal brick structure. The Afghans call this cake-shaped building the Londoni Koti, because they think it patterned after some original in London. It was built by Nasrullah Khan, brother of the murdered Amir Habibullah. Incidentally, Nasrullah Khan, who seized the throne in 1919 but was ousted by Amanullah, was in prison when we were in Kabul, so we were deprived of the opportunity of telling him that we considered him an excellent architect. A veranda ran all the way round both the first floor and the second floor of the Londoni Koti.

It sat back from the caravan highway in the

midst of an acre or two of roses. At the entrance to the grounds was a small frame house, occupied by the Afghan soldiers who were to be our guards. There were twenty-seven attendants in all, to supply our wants and keep their eyes on us. One, who apparently ran the show, was introduced as a court chamberlain, temporarily assigned to our service. As the days went by, we came to the conclusion that instead of being a court chamberlain, this addition to our entourage, whom we dubbed Boots and Spurs, was nothing more than a secret service agent.

Although no doubt he was keeping a careful record of every move that we made, every person we talked to and everything that we photographed from the moment of our arrival until the hour of our departure from forbidden Afghanistan, he assured us that he spoke not one word of English. Usually he was as taciturn and enigmatic as a sphinx. At times, however, we found him a really valuable addition to our party, because he struck awe into the hearts of recalcitrant Afghans who refused to pose before Harry Chase's cameras. If pedestrians failed to get out of our way in the Kabul bazaars, he became transformed. His silent reserve vanished.

His flow of purple Pashtu invective was nothing short of amazing. His eyes flashed fire, and he kicked people right and left. We used to marvel at him. What a New York subway guard that man would have made!

Poor Boots and Spurs got very little rest while we were at the court of the Amir. I have no doubt that we were much less likely to have our throats slit in the name of Allah by a *ghazi*, or Moslem fanatic, while he was with us, but he stuck to us so tenaciously that we tried now and then to give him the slip. If you have ever been shadowed for days by a sleuth, you will appreciate how we felt. Sometimes, when an unexpected invitation would come to dine out, we would silently slide down the balustrade from the second floor, instead of using the stairs, leap into the car and whiz out of the grounds. But Boots and Spurs certainly "knew his onions", as Chase used to say. You could not lose him! Never once did he fail to take a short cut and catch us, albeit at the sacrifice of much Oriental dignity and sometimes minus an article or two of raiment.

But I must get back to that first evening in Kabul, after our chilly reception. We were

lingering over our coffee in the dining-room. Directly over our heads hung a huge candelabrum with hundreds of glittering glass pendants. This no doubt had been transported to Kabul by caravan and must have come originally from Paris or Moscow. Niam Shah, the giant Afridi whom we had brought along as a personal bodyguard, had just finished cheering us up by begging us not to walk round the gardens after sunset. He had given this advice in Hindustani. Then, twirling one end of his long moustache, he shook his finger at us, assumed his fiercest scowl, and uttered his favourite English sentence, "Naughty boy shoot!"

Suddenly there was a rumble as of heavy artillery opening fire at the zero hour. The building rocked. The dishes slid across the table and crashed to the floor. The massive candelabrum swayed dizzily overhead. The servants' faces blanched, and they fled through the doorway, with David King and Chase and me at their heels. The rumble must have lasted for more than a minute. Then all was silent. The building had not toppled over after all.

That was our first experience with earthquakes in Afghanistan, but not the last. We had one,

usually a little less violent than that first one, served with our dinner nearly every evening. It never failed to give us a thrill. We encountered more than enough earthquakes in Afghanistan to satisfy us for the rest of our lives and until the Angel Gabriel blows his trumpet and announces the crack o' doom. It seems that Kabul is in an earthquake belt.

We had noticed that, before the hour when our first Kabul meal was served, there was no odour of cooking. Just as at Nimlah, the previous night, a string of Afghans came filing through the garden, bearing huge silver salvers atop their bulging turbans. Upon inquiring whence they came, we found that our meal had been brought more than a mile from the kitchen of another of the Amir's palaces. This procedure was followed for all the meals that we had in Kabul. These meals consisted as a rule of highly spiced saffron *pilau*, sour milk and cheese, mysterious sweet concoctions, unleavened bread baked in the ashes of the fire, all the delicious fruits for which Kabul is famous, such as nectarines, gooseberries, pomegranates, grapes and plums, and tea served in big glass tumblers.

The Amir may not have accorded us the usual

noisy Oriental reception, with the discordant blare of brass and the trumpeting and salaaming of elephants, but he was taking a precaution with regard to the safety of "our person", as Lord Curzon used to say. And this appealed to us much more than pomp and panoply. He was having our food prepared by his own chefs, just to make sure that no one put a knockout drop in it. The doctoring of food has been by no means an uncommon occurrence at the Afghan court in the past. An attempt was made to poison in this manner a late Amir, Habibullah Khan, when he was a child. His enemies finally made a complete job of it by assassinating him in 1919. Even Niam Shah, wise fellow, always prepared his own meals. Although of the same race as the ruling tribe in Afghanistan, Niam Shah was a free man from unadministered tribal territory, paying tribute to neither the Amir in Kabul nor the British *raj* in India, and he was just about as liable to be looked upon askance as we were.

After revelling in the wholly unexpected luxury of a shower-bath, with which we removed several layers of desert, we retired, wondering what surprises the next day held in store for us.

The first proved to be a sudden drop in temperature, which made us feel as if someone had transported us during the night to a glacier far up in the snowy Pamirs.

Afghanistan is subject to extreme changes in climate. Within twenty-four hours it is by no means uncommon for the mercury to slide down the thermometer from one hundred to forty or thirty. Through the summer the skies are cloudless and the sun beats down so relentlessly during the middle of the day that all activity ceases. But after sunset the wind rises and sweeps up the valley of the Kabul River with cyclonic force, sometimes at a hundred and ten miles an hour. The winters are long and bitter cold. The city is snow-bound for three months despite the fact that its latitude is that of Sicily and Southern California. During the winter, when the people forsake their charcoal stoves to go out, they wear heavy sheepskin coats, called postins. Afghan historians recount that in the eighteenth century eighteen thousand soldiers, returning from an invasion of Persia, were frozen to death. Baber, the first of the Great Moguls, who at one period made Kabul his capital, tells us in his famous memoirs that

within two hours of Kabul one may visit places where the snows never melt, and within two hours in another direction a region where snow never falls.

Our first move, of course, when morning came, was to call at the newly established Afghan Foreign Office and pay our respects to his Excellency Mohammed Vali Khan. The foreign minister had just returned from a journey round the world, undertaken in the hope that he might be able to impress other nations with the increasing importance of Afghanistan. It is in accordance with the startling policy of the Amir that his country shall no longer be looked upon as an isolated Central Asian realm of fanatic tribes.

Mohammed Vali Khan received us cordially, far more cordially than had his colleague the previous afternoon. He informed us that the Amir was at the summer palace about thirty miles away in the mountains, but would receive us in a few days. Meanwhile, his Excellency added, we were at liberty to take in the sights of Kabul. He also told us, through one of his interpreters, that his journey had been a great success and that he and his party had been particularly well received in France and Italy. But

he intimated that he had not made much headway in America. France and Italy had wholeheartedly welcomed Afghanistan into the comity of nations, but the heads of the Government in Washington, it seemed, had taken the attitude that Great Britain still was to be reckoned with in all matters relating to Afghan foreign affairs. The minister and his staff had merely been received informally by the President of the United States. Mohammed Vali Khan evidently did not like this. In fact we were to discover that all Afghans regard the British and the Americans as one family. Americans dress and look exactly like Britishers, and the British are about as popular in Afghanistan as the bubonic plague. Hence the sullen looks that had greeted us upon our arrival in Kabul!

As we were leaving the offices of the Foreign Ministry, a court interpreter called us to one side and informed us that it would be advisable for us to doff our British-looking sun-helmets and put on the Afghan head-dress. He said this was the Amir's wish, and we accordingly put on tall astrakhan hats. The object was to suggest to the crowds on the streets of Kabul that we might be Turks or emissaries from Bokhara or Moscow.

Accompanied by Boots and Spurs and a young Afghan nobleman named Feizi Ahmed Khan, we next set out to see something of this brooding city of suspicion, which, next to Lhasa in Tibet, and Mecca and Medina in Holy Arabia, is the least-known city in the world.

Like the origin of Kandahar and Herat, two other important Afghan cities, that of Kabul is lost in the mists of antiquity. The word "Kabul" means sheepfold, and no doubt the city was that and nothing more at one time. It may have survived many different civilizations, like Balkh, the deserted and ruined metropolis of northern Afghanistan. Archæologists have long yearned to explore this region, "a corridor through which the world has passed". Under a recent agreement, the archæologists of France have been granted the exclusive monopoly of excavating in Afghanistan for a period of thirty years. Their researches no doubt will throw light on historical facts that have hitherto remained concealed.

The city lies in the midst of a fertile valley at an altitude of six thousand seven hundred feet, about a thousand feet higher than Denver. Its circumference is not over six miles. It is the only city in the country that is not entirely shut

in by high walls. On two sides there are lofty, jagged mountains, and over the tops of these winds a picturesque, crumbling wall, which looks not unlike the Great Wall of China. As to the population of Kabul, no man knows, or, as the Afghans say, "God only knows". It is variously estimated at from seventy thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand. It was hopeless for us to try to make an intelligent guess. The traffic at the intersection of the main thoroughfares in the bazaar was even heavier than it is at the corner of Forty-Second Street and Broadway, New York, or State and Madison Streets in Chicago.

Kabul is by far the largest and most important city in the country. The only other centres worth noting are Kandahar and Herat in the south and west, each with a population of about thirty thousand, Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, with about twenty thousand, the ancient city of Ghazni in the mountains south of Kabul, where less than ten thousand people now dwell, and Jalalabad, where we had stopped on our way to Kabul from India.

Right through the heart of the capital runs the Kabul River. Ten bridges cross it. The bazaars lie mainly on the southern bank, and on

the opposite side are the palaces of the Amir, the more exclusive shops, and many government buildings and gardens. The river is about three hundred and fifty miles long and flows east to join the Indus at Attock, between Peshawar and Rawal Pindi, in north-western India. You can hardly call it navigable at all, despite the fact that the Afghans do make use of it with their flat-bottomed scows and their goatskin *mussaks*.

The only really navigable river in the whole country is the Oxus, which, as it winds down from the Pamirs for a distance of sixteen hundred miles until it flows into the Sea of Aral, separates the Amir's realm from Bokhara on the north. Just as the peoples of the East do not use the name "Jerusalem" or the word "Damascus", so also the dwellers in Central Asia do not speak of the Oxus. To them the river is known as the Amu Darya. The Greeks, who had a flair for renaming everything they came in contact with, called it the Oxus. So it has remained on our maps, though if you ask the average Afghan about the Oxus he will tell you that there is no such river in his country.

The only other important rivers are the Helmund, which never leaves Afghan territory, and

the Hari-Rud. After passing through miles of unexplored country and crossing the desert of Registan, the Helmund ends in a vast, salty, marshy inland sea, called the Seistan Hamun. The Hari-Rud flows past Herat and disappears in the Kara-kum, the "black sands", a flat desert of Central Asia. When I told the Amir that I should like to explore these practically unknown rivers of Afghanistan, he smiled and assured me that if I tried it I would never return alive.

We were more interested in the bazaars than in any other part of Kabul, and thither we went immediately after our interview with the foreign minister. The bazaar lanes proved to be inconceivably narrow and congested. It would have been quite impossible for a motor-car to pass through them. Nor were there any tram-cars for us to ride on, any department stores or hotels, other than the caravanserais where the camel trains load and unload. Nor were there any motion-picture theatres, as in India, featuring blood-and-thunder Wild West films. There are not even any banks in this thriving business quarter of the Afghan capital, and the coins of the country look like a lot of battered lead slugs or bullets that have flattened out against armour-plate.

CHAPTER X

THE HIDDEN HALF OF KABUL AND SOME OTHER MATTERS

"*Khubardar, khubardar!*" shouts Boots and Spurs, as we plunge into the shadows of the bazaar. "Get out of the way, you blighters!" would be the translation, if we include the inflection as well as the word itself. Here was where Boots and Spurs got in his footwork. Some of the roughest-looking brigands in that milling throng were inclined to give the court chamberlain, or our private spy—whichever you wish—the "raspberry", as Chase puts it. But following us at a distance of ten yards or so, with the barrels of their Lee-Enfields glinting above the heads of the crowd, were members of the Amir's palace guard. These gentlemen probably bolstered up the courage of Boots and Spurs. At any rate he planted the toe of his cavalry boot in the baggiest part of the baggy trousers of a few who were

slow to move out of the way, and then we went along like Bastin taking the ball through the opposition.

We thought we had seen the last word in Central Asian bazaars in Peshawar, but the bazaar there was not a patch on this maze of narrow tunnels in the heart of the Amir's capital. As for patches, the costumes of many of this throng were made of them, and the streets were canopied with patched burlap and canvas. We elbowed through miles of alley-ways, most of them narrower than the narrowest cañons in the financial section of New York and more odoriferous than Petticoat Lane in London on a Sunday in August. Sometimes the odours were so pungent that they made our eyes smart.

"*Khubardar, khubardar!*" shouted Boots and Spurs, booting a few more scraggy-looking mountaineers out of the way. Every time he did so the cold chills ran up and down our spines, because if the bazaar crowds had wanted to—and they looked as if that was just what was in their minds—they could have closed in and crushed the life out of us before the Amir's soldiers could have unslung their rifles. But the populace may have imagined us, in our astrakhan

headgear, to be a sallow-faced delegation of co-religionists from Stamboul.

Each group of merchants has its own section of the bazaar. In one street are the stalls of cobblers, who "cobble and cobble and cobble all day, and sing their songs in the same old way". Then there are the merchants from Hindustan, who squat amid bolts of gorgeous silks. At the main corner sit the money-changers, but their tiny stalls are high enough above the street level to make it difficult for young Dost Mohammed and his vandal playmates to snatch at the piles of silver rupees. Farther on are the vendors of rugs. A corpulent lot they are, sitting there on their very choicest carpets, hubble-bubbling through their water-pipes and apparently quite indifferent about ever making a sale. In the dim shadows of still another lane we come upon the butchers. There are said to be four hundred of them in Kabul, and they slaughter from two thousand to three thousand sheep a day, but seldom a bullock, for beef-eating is *verboten.* Then there are the bazaars of the coppersmiths and the silversmiths, where tiny bellows produce blue flames from morn till night and rupees are piled on one side of the scales until they balance

a coveted silver ornament on the other. Finally —or rather not finally, because there is never an end—come the stalls with luscious fruits and the booths with their steaming samovars, just as they were in the days of Marco Polo. But by far the most interesting place in that kaleidoscopic Kabul bazaar is the Piccadilly Circus of the Afghan capital, where four thoroughfares intersect and all Central Asia passes by.

If we want a puff or two, between spoonfuls of pink sherbet, why here's an old patriarch with a long pipe for rent. We give him a few coppers and he gives us a few puffs and passes the pipe on to the next man in the crowd. A very handy and sanitary Central Asian convenience! But who cares for sanitation in Kabul? Evidently there is no such word in the Afghan dictionary. Kabul is about as sanitary as Jerusalem was before Allenby drove the Turks from the Holy City and piped running water all the way up from the wells of King Solomon, south of Bethlehem.

Constantinople, Singapore, and Shanghai are cosmopolitan cities indeed, but surely no more so that Kabul. See them as they pass—Uzbegs, Kizilbashes, Ghilzais, Chakar-Aimaks; merchants

from Isfahan and Khorasan; pagans from Kafiristan, claiming descent from the army of Alexander the Great and including in their mysterious religion bits of Greek mythology as well as Zoroastrian and Buddhist tenets. There go Turkomans from Bokhara and Samarkand and slant-eyed Mongols from the far-off Gobi Desert. And of course there are Pathans, a few of the half million in the Amir's realm. The one with the patriarchal beard is no doubt their headman. Muscular frames they have and springy step. Each of them is as tough as duralumin and as dark of hue as a bronze statue. Their proud bearing is refreshing after the spinelessness of the people in the plains of India. They are both savage and distinguished looking. They meet every man eye to eye and allow no man to browbeat them. They are of the same stock as Niam Shah and live along the frontier between Afghanistan and India. They are splendid examples of the survival of the fittest. Swarming behind them comes an endless procession of Orakzais, Yusafzais, Hazars, Tajiks, Swatis, and shaggy men from Tashkent, Khokand, Kashgar, Kazan and Yarkand, men who live on the plateau beyond the snow-capped Pamirs. Where could

one find a better array of candidates for a cross-word puzzle than here ?

Niam Shah and Boots and Spurs walked on through the bazaars ahead of us hand in hand. The Faraz Bashi who had just joined us wanted to imitate the pair by interlocking little fingers with me, but in Kabul, no less than in Kalamazoo, I prefer to keep my two fists to myself.

We went to a hatter first, to buy the conical cap that goes under the turban. Inside these caps, at the top, is sewn a little roll of paper which is supposed to contain a magical text of the Koran to protect the wearer from harm. Unwinding mine later to see what picturesque *sutra* had been my talisman, I read: "Pioneer, Allabad, March" . . . It was merely a torn pellet of newsprint ! My next need was soap.

"Do not trouble," said the Faraz Bashi; "the washerman will attend to that."

"On no account will he wash me," I replied. One must draw the line somewhere, even in Kabul.

"You want to soap yourself ?" exclaimed my friend in amazement. "We in Afghanistan use it for harness or the laundry. The handmaidens of personal purity are sand and running water as

the Holy Prophet directed. However, we shall doubtless find what you require in the Hindu bazaar——" The Faraz Bashi's sentence trailed off into a mutter, but I think he added that Hindus were uncircumcised and unclean.

Soap was found in many varieties. Chairs and tea were brought by an obsequious red-turbaned follower of Siva (all Hindus in Afghanistan are compelled to wear red or yellow turbans and to pay a poll-tax), who brought out for our inspection perfumes, wrist watches, fountain-pens, and alarm clocks from Connecticut, whose value is judged by the loudness of their tick. His stock was much what would be found in any Indian bazaar, and I soon moved to the picturesque coppersmith's quarter, to the great relief of the Faraz Bashi, who disliked sitting upright on European chairs as much as it irks me to remain cross-legged throughout an Oriental visit.

The Hindu shopman is almost oppressively civil, whereas the Afghan is the reverse. You may buy or not as you please. But one similarity they share: both ask double the price they expect to get. We bought nothing in the copper bazaar, for our luggage was limited, but we got

an "earful" of sound. Such cacophonies on copper hubble-bubbles and symphonies on nascent samovars I never heard. Nerves are apt to be at strain during an Asian summer, but a course in the coppersmiths' bazaar would cure any hyper-sensitive traveller who objects to the chirp of crickets at noon, or the song of the brain-fever bird at night, unless it drove him mad.

In the bazaars of Kabul, as yet untouched by Western civilization, you may see more primitive peoples and more varying types than in any other part of Central Asia. In the heart of the city there is a maze of narrow streets, converging on that central *rotunda*, where money-changers squat on raised platforms, above the madding throng, yet accessible to all who require their services. While the others continued their shopping, I climbed up, among rupees and Indian bank-notes and snuff and reed-pens and long yellow account-books, to view the pageant of swashbucklers and shrouded figures that passed beneath this convenient eerie. My host of the hour was a Hindu merchant, who had been kidnapped, so he informed me, years ago in the reign of Abdur Rahman. At that time he had been fifteen years of age, and because of his

personal charm (as he modestly said) he was not harmed by the bandits who captured him and killed his father, but was treated as one of themselves and was eventually sold for about £20 to an Afghan noble who was finding some difficulty in meeting the household bills of his wives and concubines, and needed the services of an expert scribe. In former times he had been able to embezzle enough money from the state taxes he farmed to support his various establishments; but under the new Amir, who demanded accurate accounting, cash was not so easily come by, although obviously the money was still there, if only he could devise a scheme to transfer it from the pockets of the people to his own treasure chest without undue interference from the Amir.

To this task my friend bent all his youthful enthusiasm and succeeded so well that he was eventually able to buy his freedom and follow his hereditary calling of financier and grain merchant. Slavery, he told me in passing, was a name only in Afghanistan. Bondmen and concubines are well treated and enjoy better opportunities than the children of the poor but free, on account of their association with educated masters. Nothing could stop a slave of character

from rising. So the Hindu said, although I fancy his attitude may have been that of the typical "success" who does not believe in luck, no, sir, but in hard work and attention to business. Soon my friend became a power in the Afghan Wall Street where I sat, and entangled his whilom owner in a web of financial transactions which redounded to their mutual profit and his own importance in the city.

"I would not go back to India now," he told me; "for my whiskers have grown white as the Sufed Koh, and my caste-brothers have long since sipped their final draft from Mother Ganges. But my sons are in the blessed country of the Five Rivers, studying law and the best means to overthrow the British Government. When they have overthrown it, they will return —before I die; they will return, at any rate, to perform the rites at my funeral pyre, so that my ashes will go down the Kabul River to the Indus, whence my forefathers came. And it will be well.

"But tell me," continued the Hindu in brighter vein, "would you be interested in a Kaffir girl, with skin of whey and eyes like Zuleikha's? She is a Christian," he added, as if the fact would further adorn her beauty.

"And how are you interested in her?" I asked.

"Asaf Khan wagered her on his fighting quail," he answered. "It was all he had left. She is now with my wives. She cooks *helluva* that is a liquid lyric. For a thousand rupees she would be a gift, especially to a stranger, who must be lonely."

"What are your recreations here?" said I, finding the conversation somewhat personal.

"We talk. We sit in the park and listen to the nightingales. We study love, of which you in the West know little. Even a Kaffir girl could"—but the Hindu was a diplomat and switched the subject—"could tell you something of our customs. Here we sit, and watch the men and women go by. It is life, is it not? And of the women you can imagine what you will, for their faces you will never see."

Black veils and white veils moved silently in the throngs below. In each was a woman, young or old, ugly or beautiful, screened for ever from the outside world, from the day she had entered the harem to the day when she would pass, still sheeted, to her long repose. The hidden half of Islam! How little any traveller tells of it. Even the white women who have

lived in harems! A few facts we gathered, but of the hearts and hopes of these little figures, what can one say?

Yet women are treated better here than in many another part of Asia. As is now the case all over the Mohammedan world, polygamy is the exception rather than the rule, and the Amir sets a good example to his subjects by having only one wife. Perhaps the tyranny of the harem has been exaggerated. Some women acquire great power in Afghanistan, and the Islamic custom with regard to dowry, inheritance, and the right of a wife to control her own money, far from being harsher than the code of civilized countries, was for centuries in advance of our own property laws.

A girl sells at from £20 to £60, according to her family connections and personal appearance, but she is not married until after the age of sixteen, so that the degenerate offspring of child marriages so often seen in India are not to be found in this more northern clime. A widow is not supposed to remarry without the consent of her husband's eldest brother; but in practice, and with a fair share of the tact of her sex, in which the Afghan girl is by no means deficient,

she can secure the man of her choice. The hardship of "arranged" marriages has probably been exaggerated. Before taking a man for better or worse, débutantes contrive to see their suitors (and a great deal else that goes on in Kabul), so that although perhaps less sophisticated that the flappers of the Middle West, they are none the less neither blind nor deaf nor "dumb" in any sense of the term.

Love potions, spells, and charms are in great demand in the hidden half of Kabul. A favourite formula of the black art is the frog enchantment. A male and a female frog are placed back to back. On each a black heart is painted, the frogs being given a sleeping-draught to render them sufficiently quiet to undergo this embellishing potion They are then put in an oven and baked alive. When there is nothing left but a fine white ash, this powder, according to current Afghan belief is possessed of marvellous potency for retaining the affection of a lover. Thus if Miss Mumtaz goes out to sip sherbet with Miss Fatima, the former takes a little of the powder along with her in a turquoise snuff-box. When Fatima's back is turned in the preparation of the Kabuli equivalent of chocolate malted milk, Mumtaz

sprinkles a pinch of the frog enchantment on the back of Fatima's skirt and some more on the silk-lined *diwan*. This will ensure Mumtaz's husband's safety from Fatima's alluring eyes.

"Why do Europeans and Americans sell their wives ?" asked my Hindu friend unexpectedly.

"They don't."

"It is published in the newspapers that they do," said the grain merchant. "Here the people are barbarous perhaps ; they do not know the wisdom of the Vedas, nor even the law of their own Koran. But when a man tires of his domestic life, he does not bring his troubles to a magistrate and ask him to decide how much the co-respondent shall pay him for the privilege of taking his wife away. Instead, he says, 'I divorce thee' three times in the presence of witnesses. Then his troubles are over. Or else he kills her."

"Are many women killed ?" I asked.

"Who can say what happens in the harems ? Can you read the thoughts of these people who are passing below you ?"

Indeed I could not. Unchanged in the last thousand years, the people of Central Asia were strolling through the bazaar, inscrutable, perverse,

and a little listless from the heat perhaps, but carefree and content. The women wore red slippers, baggy white trousers and a black overall, or *burka*, with meshed eye-pieces like a diver's helmet. A few Powindah girls passed unveiled, with the easy carriage and the rosy cheeks of nomad life, but except for these, all wore the slave-badge of *purdah*, the veil that women affect in countries where their virtue is not safe. Undoubtedly, in proportion as Afghanistan continues independent and progressive, there will be a revulsion against these customs of a conquered country. Like their sisters at Angora, the ladies at Kabul will demand their place in the sunlight and fresh air, despite the head-shaking and beard-wagging of priests and other *laudatores temporis acti*. The men wear the same baggy trousers as women. The headgear is as various as the races that passed before me—Afghans with blue or white turbans, Heratis with tall Persian caps, gentry with the Turkish fez rakishly askew, soldiers with the lambskin *tarboosh*. Sometimes there passed a *mast malang* or wandering dervish, steeped to the eyes in hemp and wearing a *dilaq* or patchwork quilt. Sometimes again a priest went by, with full-robed black coat, white turban,

long beard, and horn-rimmed glasses; or a young blood, with lace cuffs at wrist and ankle, eyes ringed with *kohl* and a fighting quail perching placidly on his forearm.

King and Chase returned as I sat watching, jerking me like a hooked fish from the waters of this river of races that passed below. It was past high noon; my financier was yawning and the traffic at the Kabul Broadway and Forty-Second Street was perceptibly thinning. This was the time for food and rest, the hours from two to four in the afternoon being as sacred to sleep in Afghanistan as the same hours at night in other lands.

We returned to a banquet of chicken rice and mulberries. The food in Afghanistan, both of the rich and the poor, would delight a dietitian's heart. Unleavened bread, "roughage", fruits rich in vitamins and mineral salts—such is the diet of the tall and sturdy Afghan. After lunch I lay down in shuttered twilight while the sights and sounds and scents of the bazaar faded below the threshold of consciousness. Awakening suddenly from a dream of fair Kaffirs and fighting quails, I dressed again to keep an appointment at the Baber Bagh.

CHAPTER XI

SHAHABUDDIN KHAN AND THE BABER BAGH

ONE of the most delightful spots in the vicinity of Kabul is the high-walled garden known as the Baber Bagh, in a corner of which is the grave of one of the greatest men that ever lived, Baber, "The Tiger", who founded the dynasty of the magnificent Moguls. This shrine is a place of pilgrimage not for Afghans alone, but for people from all parts of Central Asia, and I went there often, in the days immediately before my audience with the Amir, to spend the heat of the day in its green shade and to prepare myself for meeting with this most menaced monarch in the world to-day.

But the glory has departed now and the bulbuls sing sadly in the Baber Bagh. For two centuries the spirit of the Great Moguls flamed here. Then it flickered and passed into the night. The Star of India now shines on the breast of the British Viceroy in Delhi. But

Kabul bides her time. One day, so runs the talk of the bazaar, a conqueror will come of the seed of Baber to bring back the glories of the Moguls and to restore the Thousand Cities of Balkh, Kabul, the stamping-ground of kings, and all these mountain nurseries of fighting-men to the splendour of medieval times. When will he come?

The Baber Bagh lies to the west of Kabul. Within it we found formal flower-beds, of pansies, red and white roses and double marguerites, between strips of well-kept turf. Birds twittered. A white-robed *imam* conned a yellow-leafed Koran. Water rippled from a terrace, cypresses stood against the turquoise sky, all just as in the other delightful gardens of the Moguls that lie like oases scattered across the dust and drought of India. But we missed the mausoleum, which was built for Baber over his last resting-place. A white-domed mosque it was, where the roses he loved so well in life twined over his grave and where *imams* intoned the ninety-nine names of Allah. The tomb has vanished, crumbled, and decayed in the turmoil of the centuries, so that only a plain white headstone remains with the names and attributes of him who founded an illustrious line of kings.

bazaars of Ghazni, Kabul and Samarkand famous throughout the world. One hundred thousand male prisoners were taken, and no doubt as many were killed. All India lay a vassal at the feet of Kabul.

Often in the Baber Bagh I tried to recapture in imagination something of the history of those times when Kabul held half the earth in fee. It is curious that there is no history of Afghanistan in print. I have searched the Oriental libraries of India's great universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras for some connected and trustworthy account. Since my return I have gone through other libraries in London, New York and Washington. But my quest has been in vain. To be sure there are references to Afghanistan in many works in many languages. But in spite of its tremendous strategical importance to-day as a buffer between the East and the West, not even a satisfactory historical description of it has yet been written. This is not the place to attempt any phase of the task, but a few facts as they were told to me in Baber's garden by a wise old Afghan will help to frame the present state in modern Central Asia with its vast potentialities for peace and war.

But his spirit still lives in this lovely spot laid out according to his own ideas.

It was in this garden, or just such another, that Baber made his plans to lead his Tartar horsemen and burly nomads down to the rich plains of Panipat, near Delhi, where he fought one of the decisive battles of Asia in 1526. Such colossal booty fell into his hands as a result of this battle that he was able to give £2,000 in cash to each of his chief officers, and corresponding rewards in silver and rare silks to everyone not only in his army but in his kingdom, so that every man, woman and child, slave or free, then living under his rule received a share of the spoils. Although many other conquerors have sought the favour of Kabul, the city has never seen loot on quite this scale since the days of Baber, and she reveres the memory of the Tiger accordingly. The wealth that Baber gained at the gates of Delhi, in this one action, staggers the imagination. At least a brace of attractive girls accompanied every soldier home. Sack-loads of pearls and rubies from Hindu temples and a whole corps of skilled artificers and craftsmen versed in the arts of a rich and peaceful country were brought back across the Indus to make the

bazaars of Ghazni, Kabul and Samarkand famous throughout the world. One hundred thousand male prisoners were taken, and no doubt as many were killed. All India lay a vassal at the feet of Kabul.

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My informant was Mirza Shahabuddin Khan, a learned Kizilbash related to the royal family of Khiva. We sat under a deodar on thick Kerman rugs while a young slave from Kafiristan stood behind us with a cow-tail whisk to keep the midges away. As if by magic a brass tray appeared with little cups of Persian sherbet and packets of American cigarettes, containing pictures of "movie" stars. Fortunately we could dispense with an interpreter, since Shahabuddin spoke French.

"Soon," he was saying, "you will be received by his Majesty. And what do you know of our hopes and difficulties—and the king's dangers? You come and you go so quickly; there is no time for understanding in your country. Yet I am told that you write."

"True, Mirza Sahib, I write, and therefore I ask questions. I would hear the truth from your lips."

"We might hold converse for years in this garden. But would it be the truth? Who knows but that history is lies? We in the East have the ancient philosophy of those who lived here in the Cradle of Mankind uncounted ages ago. Under many names and forms it has

always been the creed of the One God. That is more than your tales in lesson-books. But you want names and forms; that is what the West always wants. I will tell you what I know of them.

"Tradition has it that Zoroaster, the prophet of your modern Parsis, lived in Balkh, in Afghan Turkestan. More than two and a half centuries later—and what is time but a breath of Allah? —soldiers of the great Alexander ravished the women of this valley and left a seal of beauty behind them in the blue eyes that some of us have to this day. Who can tell what else is between and behind these eyes?"

Mirza Shahabuddin stopped and was lost in thought. He was a Sufi and no doubt versed in mystical tenets. "The beautiful Roxana, wife of Alexander," he continued, "came from the north of my country. Her form was slender as yonder cypress, and her two eyes made the Pleiades weep with envy. But she was a pagan, of course, and indeed for long centuries after the Prophet Isa (Jesus), whose name be blessed, the land was under the rule of idolatrous or Buddhist kings. But after Mohammed, our holy prophet, to whom be dominion, power, and glory, had

rested from his earthly labours, some Arabs in the caliphate of Maowiya came to these mountains. For another two centuries the land was divided between followers of the Prophet of Islam, the Buddha, and the black cults of ancient faiths. But finally Yakub the Ghazi conquered Ghazni and Kabul and made the idolators bend the knee of humility and place the forehead of subjection upon the carpet of true religion."

"When was it that you were all converted to Islam?" asked King, who was sitting with us.

Mirza Shahabuddin spread his hands with a nescient gesture. "A thousand or two thousand years ago. Your Western dates are nothing to me," he replied.

While he motioned to his slave-boy to put another cigarette into his long amber holder and light it for him, I made a note. Later I found it was A.D. 870 that Yakub conquered Afghanistan. Sultan Mahmud ascended the throne of Ghazni A.D. 997.

Mirza Shahabuddin puffed and thought. "Whenever it was, there came a time when we were all warriors of the One God, and it was then that our glorious days arrived. Under Mahmud, a slave like the one behind us—but

uglier, for he was pocked—our soldiers conquered all Hindustan from here to the navel of the world in the Himalaya and to the Gujarat peninsula. Then came Timur and Baber, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, whose names are stars in the sky of story. It was in the reign of Jahangir that the park at Nimlah (between Jalalabad and Kabul, where we had spent a night) was laid out by Nur Jahan, his empress. Nur Jahan was an Afghan girl. If you want to see what our girls are like, look at the miniatures of her."

"Mirza Sahib," I laughed, "I should prefer to look on flesh and blood. But since I may not, tell me about her."

"She was a foundling who rose to be queen. She was born on the caravan route between Kabul and Peshawar and abandoned by her parents; for a girl baby was of no value to them in their quest for fortune at Akbar's court. But a rich merchant found her and carried her to Lahore. Fifteen years later she made her mark there by attracting the notice of the young Prince Jahangir. After many adventures she married him and became empress of Afghanistan and India. She is the only queen of Islam whose

signature is on documents of state. During her reign the English came."

There was an interlude here while the slave-boy brought a Kabuli musk-melon such as Baber wrote of regretfully from the plains of India.

"There is a woman behind every trouble," I prompted my Kizilbash historian.

"It was a servant of Nur Jahan who gave the British their foothold," he said. "She was a favourite maid of the empress. As she was going upstairs one night, her skirts took fire from an oil-cresset. Being badly burned and near death, she was permitted to have the services of a British doctor who happened to be at the court. He prescribed philtres of such marvellous power that she was cured. As a reward, instead of asking for a bag of gold or a flagon of attar of roses, he stipulated that his country should be granted certain trading privileges on the Hugli River. Thus it was that you came to Kabul."

"But I am an American."

"There is no difference," said Mirza Shahabuddin. "You would fill our country with machines and smoke, make slaves equal to their

nasters, and destroy true religion. Not you, ny friend, but the destiny behind you.

"After the Great Moguls passed their zenith vith Aurangzeb, the story of my country is vritten in the blood of murdered kings. One ıfter another they died of knife, poison or bullet. 3ut always in our hills we have demanded that we should rule ourselves.

"Seventy-five years ago the British sent an embassy here. We murdered them all, carried the ambassador's head through the street, and hung his body in the bazaar. Of the army that was with him—a thousand white men, four thousand Indians, and ten thousand camp-followers—one single and solitary man reached Peshawar alive. Later, Great Britain sent us another ambassador, and him we also killed, along with the three British officers and seventy-five men of his escort. Of course Great Britain made war with us, but she accomplished nothing —just wasted men and money. Finally, about fifty springs ago, as nearly as I can remember, Abdur Rahman, a grandson of the great Amir Dost Mohammed, came down from Turkestan and took the Amirate. (He assumed the throne of Kabul in July, 1880, receiving from the British

a subsidy of £50,000 a year, which was cor tinued to his successor, the father of Kin Amanullah.) Between Russia, Persia, and Gre Britain, our ruler guided his footsteps sternly b the light of Divine Providence. Well can remember him, a very king among men, a pilla of the faith and a sun of wisdom.

"Next came his son, Habibullah Khan, wh mounted the throne in peace, for the first tim in our history—so auspicious was the rul of his father. Habibullah went down t India and met Lord Curzon and Lor Kitchener. Of the latter he often spoke wit admiration. At this great man's hands h received initiation into your masonic mysteries The degrees, which take months for the initiat to pass, as do our Sufi ceremonies, were con ferred on our Amir by royal dispensation in th course of a single night. He was a friend of th English, but no Englishman came to Kabu except by his invitation. During the Worl War he stood foot to foot and knee to knee witl Great Britain. Outwardly he did many thing to please the missions from Germany and Turke that came to us during the fighting. But trusted messenger had meanwhile gone t

Delhi to clasp the Viceroy's hand in secret amity.

"These things happened in my lifetime," concluded the Kizilbash, simply.

"But what of to-day ?" I asked. "For to-morrow I may meet his Majesty."

"To-day, ah, if you ask an Afghan about to-day, he will talk about the scenery. And why not ? Look at the stars, my friends. In their light, so calm and clear and cold, of what import are our petty plots and counterplots ? Better it is to turn our thoughts to prayer and to the Most High, the Giver of Light."

With that Mirza Shahabuddin Khan, the Kizilbash, rose and went to the fountain, kicked the slippers off his feet, rinsed hands and feet and mouth, and, with the suppleness born of long practice in devotion, performed the two-bow prayer with his face towards Mecca.

As the mountains rising above Kabul to the west threw the long shadows of twilight across the valley, we left the garden together.

Little enough could I learn of the dark conspiracies that ushered in the reign of the Amir. Rumours are rife but facts are few. The late Habibullah Khan was friendly to the

British. His brother Nasrullah Khan was not. An attempt was made on Habibullah's life in 1918, and on February 20, 1919, he was assassinated in his tent near Jalalabad. The eldest two sons, Inayatullah Khan and Hayatullah Khan, immediately declared in favour of their uncle, Nasrullah, giving colour to the suspicion that they were all three privy to the plot.

A portion of the garrison of Jalalabad went over to Nasrullah, while the remainder hesitated. Meanwhile lightning decisions were being made at Kabul. Amanullah Khan, the third son, was governor at the capital. He promptly seized the Treasury and declared himself Amir, with the support of his mother, Ulya Hazrat Begum, who is a famous character in recent Afghan history. Possession of the purse-strings of the realm gave Amanullah immediate and practical power. Kabul acclaimed him, and the doubtful garrison of Jalalabad soon did likewise, deciding no doubt that their pay, irregular in any case, would become non-existent in the event of revolution. Thus it happened that Amanullah was able to publish, on February 27, 1919, a manifesto, which, with the accompanying letters, also dated February 27, is given here :

In the Name of God, Most Merciful and Compassionate——

O high-minded nation!

O courageous army!

This weak creature of the Creator of the Universe, your Amir, Amir Amanullah, gives you joyful tidings that, thank God—and again thank God—the Government of this great nation of ours and the sacred soil of our beloved country have in a very admirable way remained peaceful and safe from the horrors of such a disturbance as was calculated to make our enemies—near and far—happy and joyful, and our friends much concerned. . . .

Listen, the facts are as follows:

You have already been informed by proclamations, firmans, and notices of the details of what has happened.

This happy news now is this: the bold and courageous army of our Government at Jalalabad displayed the greatest sense of honour and courage in the discharge of their obligations. On Thursday, 25 Jamadi-ul-Awal, 1337, Hijra (February 27, 1919), all the officers and soldiers who had accompanied his late Majesty, my father, the martyr, assembled on the parade-ground of the cantonment at Jalalabad, swore allegiance to me with the band playing, a salute of guns, and great rejoicings. Thereafter they arrested and imprisoned all persons who were entrusted with the safeguarding of his late Majesty and who were on special duty in the royal bedroom at the time of the assassination and demanded their being called to

account and punished by my uncle, who without any religious or worldly right had acted as usurper and declared himself as Amir. Since no false claimant can establish his illegal claim, my uncle, who had no legal right, voluntarily abdicated the Amirship and recognized me as Amir. . . .

O high-minded nation of Afghanistan! Let us offer thousands of thanks and praises most humble to the imperishable God of the earth and heavens with our burning hearts and bleeding eyes that He has saved our sublime Government from the horrors of commotion and confusion and has inspired our Islamic Government with more strength, power and freedom.

O courageous army of the Government of Afghanistan! I offer thousands of thanks and endless praise to God, the Most Holy—praise be to Him—that your soul-consuming bullets and heart-piercing steel spear-heads, which were kept ready for the protection of the honour of the faith and nation of our country, have by the grace of God been prevented from being used for our self-destruction and against each other. Understand it well and carefully realize that this is due to the special favour and mercy of God Almighty and the spiritual blessings of the Prophet, which have been showered on our Government and nation. It is the eternal will of the unchangeable Creator, exalted be His glory. . . .

O nation with a nice sense of honour!

O brave army!

While my great nation were putting the crown of

the kingdom on my head, I declared to you with a loud voice that I would accept the crown and throne only on the condition that you should all co-operate with me in my thoughts and ideas. Therefore I explained to you at the time and I repeat here a summary thereof:

First, that the Government of Afghanistan should be internally and externally independent and free; that is to say that all rights of government that are possessed by other independent powers of the world should be possessed in their entirety by Afghanistan.

Secondly, that you should unite with me with all your force in avenging the unlawful assassination of my late father, the martyr, who was spiritually a father to you all.

Thirdly, that the nation should be free; that is to say that no individual should be oppressed and subjected to any high-handedness or tyranny by any other individual. Of course obedience to the sacred law of Mohammed and civil and military laws is looked upon as a glorious honour, for which we, the great nation of Afghanistan, are by disposition and nature well known.

I would not accept your crown except under these conditions. All of you, members of the high-minded, strong nation, accepted these conditions with enthusiasm and acclamation, and I put that overcoming crown on my head with extreme honour and with determined resolution and purpose, thus putting my head under the heavy weight of *imamat* and *amarat* (religious leadership and rulership). I hope

that you, my faithful, prudent, and high-minded nation, will pray of the Creator of the earth and heavens to favour me with strength to be successful in my undertaking and in doing all that may be necessary for your welfare and prosperity; and that you will co-operate with me manfully in the execution of my thoughts and ideas. O nation! At present I abolish at the outset the system of *begar* (impressed labour) in the country. Henceforth no labour will be impressed, and not a single individual will be employed by force from among you in making roads, working on public works, tree-cutting, etc. And by the grace of God our sublime Government will employ such measures of reform as may prove suitable and useful to the country and nation so that the Government and nation of Afghanistan may make and gain great renown in the civilized world and take its proper place among the civilized powers of the world.

For the rest, I pray to God for His favours and mercy and seek His help for the welfare and prosperity of you Moslems and all mankind. From God I seek guidance and the completion of my wishes.

Seal of Amir Amanullah.

Translation of a letter from Sardars Inayatullah Khan and Hayatullah Khan to Amir Amanullah Khan.

Our dear and beloved brother. Since it was the will of Eternal God this sad event should happen regarding our father, it was unavoidable. The tumult and events that have happened during this week in

our family and among the military at Jalalabad have been observed. If the fire of this dissension becomes ablaze, it will lead to great ruination and subversion of a civilized community and the destruction of our royal family. Therefore, since the royal robes have proved suitable to your august body, our beloved brother, who was destined for *imamat* and *amarat*, it is fitting that he should receive the congratulations of his brothers. Accordingly we convey our congratulations and trust that we shall enjoy mutual confidence. We hope, please God, to have the pleasure of seeing you after making arrangements for our departure.

O hidden from sight, we entrust you to God.

INAYATULLAH.
HAYATULLAH.

Translation of a letter from Sardar Nasrullah Khan to Amir Amanullah Khan.

May Almighty God—glorious be His Kindgom—keep the body of my beloved son and the light of my eyes, Amir Amanullah Khan, safe from misfortunes of the world and make him always prosperous.

I had accepted the Amirship of Afghanistan at the solicitation and swearing of allegiance to me of my sons Muin-es-Sultana and Azad-ud-Daula and other dear relatives, royal servants, and civil and military officers, of which I had informed you in detail. Later on I received your communication, from which it appeared that the people of the capital

of Kabul had sworn allegiance to you and that you had accepted the Amirship of the Government of Afghanistan. Therefore, since I had no desire to become Amir and had agreed to take up that heavy load upon my shoulders only for the sake of looking after you and in consideration of the protection of the faith and nation of Afghanistan and I had not the remotest idea of displeasing you, and since I look upon you, as I always did as my dear and beloved son, and consider your Amirship, Government, and power as my own, I of my own free will and accord abdicate my Amirship and pray that God Almighty may make your *imamat* and *amarat* enduring. I shall, please God, shortly leave for the capital of Kabul and have the pleasure of kissing your eyes and offering you my hand of allegiance. For the rest, our days may be prosperous.

NASRULLAH.

But Nasrullah never had the pleasure of kissing his nephew's eyes. Not by a long way. No one knows exactly what has happened to him. Or those who know will not say. It is a subject not mentioned in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER XII

ABDUR RAHMAN THE RELENTLESS

SOME knowledge of the late and great Abdur Rahman is requisite to any understanding of modern Afghanistan, for it was his genius that fashioned the nucleus of a modern kingdom out of congeries of scattered and warring tribes. Directly opposite the Amir's palace is the Bagh-i-Bala, the tomb of Abdur Rahman. The entrance is from the street and is dilapidated with the blight that overtakes so many Moslem buildings. A plain dome, red brick walls, a single room where a *mullah* sits with a sere-leaved Koran praying for the spirit of him who when alive recked little enough of *mullahs* and texts—such is the tomb of Abdur Rahman.

In life he was a bold bad Amir. In death he is a saint. He made men tremble at his ruthless punishments, smoked, drank when it suited his whim, mocked pious men who disagreed with